THE MAGAZINE OF

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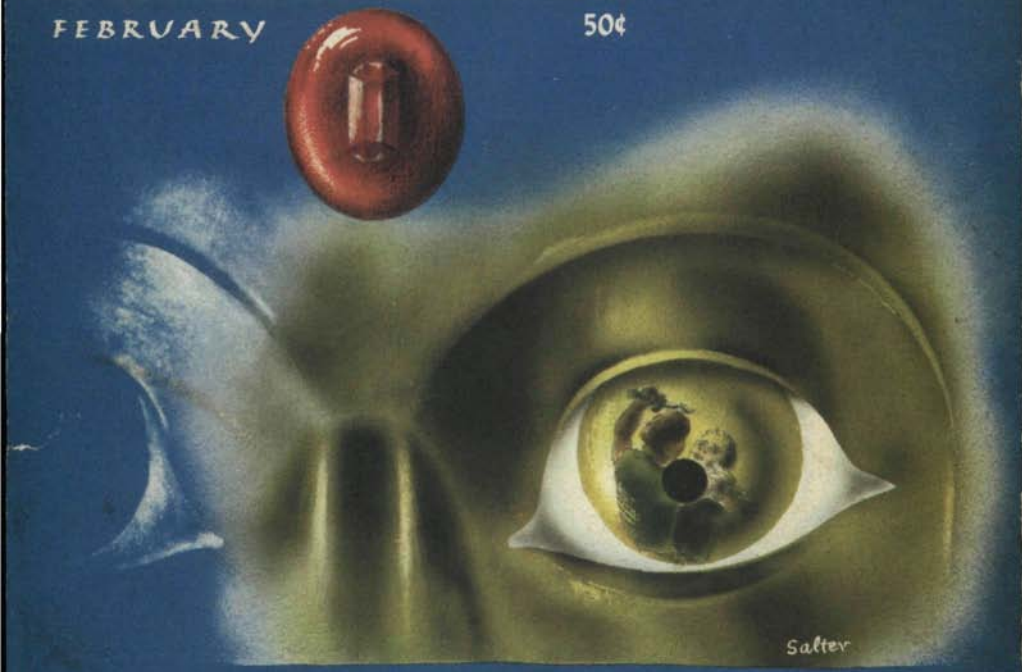

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Against Authority — by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

Witness for the Persecution — by RANDALL GARRETT

The Mountains of Magnatz — by JACK VANCE

ISAAC ASIMOV, JUDITH MERRIL, THEODORE L. THOMAS

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

FEBRUARY *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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EDITORIAL

The largest volume of mail which crosses our desk each day is that which is classified in the trade as "the slush pile." This blunt term is usually used in preference to the one you'll find at the very bottom of our contents page, where it says, ". . . the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts," but in both cases what is referred to is that vast bulk of stories which any editor must read: stories submitted by unknown, and usually non-professional, writers.

No fiction magazine can hope to survive solely upon the regular submissions of established writers or their agents. Normal attrition among writers will assure that. In writers, as in all professions, there is a continual turnover. And implicit in this turnover is the emergence of new writers.

They come from the slush pile.

For that reason, we scan each day's batch eagerly, looking for the next Robert Heinlein, James Blish, or A. E. van Vogt. And periodically we hit a Live One—a submission which is not merely purchaseable, but bodes well for the author's future.

We've watched several new writers come up this way, battling rejection slips to finally find their way into our pages. We rejected over a dozen stories by Larry Niven before we enthusiastically bought his "Becalmed in Hell" for our July issue last year. Tom Disch followed the same route—and rubbed our face in it when he pointed out that we'd bounced a story of his we later admired when it was published elsewhere.

These authors we count among our successes, but they are only a few of the new authors whose careers we helped launch. It is a rare issue of this Magazine when we do not have a "first" story by an author new to print, or new to our field. That being the case, perhaps you'd like to know how you might join these ranks.

There are certain essentials, of course. Any issue of *Writer's Digest* will point them out to you. We ask that your submission be typewritten, double-spaced, and not typed so faintly that we must strain in strong light to make it out.

More important, your submission must have enclosed with it a stamped, self-addressed envelope in which we may return your manuscript if it is unsuitable for us.

Beyond that, there is nothing to do but to post your manuscript (the cheapest way being to mark it, "Contents: Manuscript—Special 4th Class Rate," which entitles you to the special rates of 10¢ for the first pound, 5¢ for each additional pound), and sit back and wait.

And next issue we'll tell you exactly what happens while you're waiting . . .

—Ted White

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This story, and the cover painting which accompanies it, mark a reunion of sorts. The artist, George Salter, created the design for this magazine as well as many of its early covers. The stories of R. Bretnor appeared here often in the early 50s, less frequently than we would like in recent years. This story, about Joe Gadge's whirlwind trip to the Mysterious East, may awaken some pangs of nostalgia for older readers, and will be fun for all.

THE GADGE SYSTEM

by R. Bretnor

WHEN MR. BULSTRODE HEARD that Joe Gadge was going to Burma, he sent for him right away. He offered him a seat, and passed him a cigar out of the box on his desk. "What's this I hear, Joe?" he said. "The boys tell me you're leaving us."

"Uh-huh," said Joe, biting the end off the cigar and feeling to see if his copy of *Slithery Jungle Stories* was still in the pocket of his coveralls.

"I sure hate to see you go—" Mr. Bulstrode sounded really disappointed. "—especially now, with the new Eight all ready to come out. It'll say 550-H.P. SUPER-EXECUTIVE WIDE-STRIDE in chrome on the hood, like this year it says CLASSY-FLEX only twice as big, and you'll only have to use two rivets on it instead of three. Too bad you'll be missing out on it, Joe. You've been on Assembly Station 32-A a long time."

"Eleven years straight," said Joe, "not countin' Korea—and then the army only got me as far as St. Paul. I wasn't lucky like Herman Slotterbeck. He went everywhere."

"Well, travel while you can, I always say. I suppose you've landed a good job in Burma?"

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"Job?" Joe looked puzzled. "What job?"

Mr. Bulstrode looked puzzled too. "Your job in Burma. I guess you'll make pretty good money there?"

Joe ran a big hand over his crewcut. "I got money. I got eighteen hundred bucks. Uncle Morton died."

Mr. Bulstrode frowned. "But if you haven't a job in Burma, why are you going there?"

"To get me a ruby," said Joe.

"A *what*?"

"A great big ruby," Joe explained. "Out of an idol's eye. It's this way, Mr. Bulstrode. I been goin' with Daisy two years now, and she won't say yes, or no, or nothin'. I figure I got to put up some real competition—buy her a swell television set, and a mink coat, and—" He blushed. "—and one of them new SUPER-EXECUTIVE WIDE-STRIDE Eights. So I'm goin' to find me a ruby I can sell for maybe a million dollars. Because if I don't, Mr. Bulstrode, Herman Slotterbeck is goin' to beat my time sure. He owns a duplex and rents half of it."

Mr. Bulstrode ran his finger around inside his collar. "Sure, sure," he agreed nervously. "You've got to do something. And Burma's just the place to do it. Nice place to live, they tell me. Fine cli—"

"Oh, I don't figure on livin' there!" Joe broke in. "It's mostly jungle, and you gotta watch out for dacoits all the time. Boy, are they mean! Once they know you got a ruby, they climb right in your bedroom window. Before you know it, you're strangled with a silken cord—*phht!* like that!" He stuck his tongue out and rolled his eyes, and Mr. Bulstrode swallowing hard, began to inch his hand toward the button that called his secretary.

"Well," said Joe, starting to get up. "I got lots to do. If I was to tell Daisy goodbye, she'd likely nix the whole thing. So I'm goin' to write her a letter. I better get start—"

Mr. Bulstrode was out from behind his desk in no time at all. "Too bad, too bad! Sorry you can't stay longer. But I mustn't keep you." Reaching an arm around Joe's shoulders, he began walking him to the door. "We'll be pulling for you, Joe. You just get out there and find yourself an idol with a million-dollar eye. That'll fix old Herman Slotterbeck, ha-ha! Yes, indeed." Mr. Bulstrode opened the door with his free hand. "If there's ever anything I can do for you, just let me know."

"Gosh, Mr. Bulstrode, could you get the foreman to give Herman lots of overtime so he won't see too much of Daisy?"

"Glad to, glad to." Mr. Bulstrode pumped Joe's hand up and down. "Have a nice trip. Take care of yourself. Goodbye."

Almost before Joe could say,

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"Gee, thank you, Mr. Bulstrode," the door snapped closed, and he was on his way to the time-keeper's office to draw his pay.

Naturally, he didn't realize that Mr. Bulstrode thought he was plain nuts. If he had, he could have explained that he had a real, sure-fire system. Because Joe knew just about all there was to know about jungles, especially in Burma, and about dacoits, and finding rubies in idols' eyes. Every lunch hour, and every evening except Tuesdays and Saturdays, when he took Daisy to the movies, he slipped off into the Mysterious East. He'd been doing it for years. His room was simply stacked with books by Sax Rohmer and Talbot Mundy, and with copies of *Slithery Jungle Stories.*

Three days later, when a tall, middle-aged Englishman and a sallow native boarded Joe's plane at Benares, his Oriental experience began to come in handy. The Englishman wore tweeds and a beautifully brushed-up Guards moustache, and carried a briefcase. The native wore a white turban and a long black coat buttoned all the way, and carried an untidy umbrella. The Englishman sat down directly across the aisle. The native slithered into the seat behind him. And Joe *sensed* instantly that there was something odd about them.

During the next couple of hours, he tried several times to start a conversation by whistling "On The Road To Mandalay." But the Englishman didn't recognize it, so he gave it up and went on with the third installment of "Doctor Krishna's Last Try" in *Slithery Jungle Stories.* In his secret laboratory, the Doctor was preparing to operate on the Governor-General's lovely, green-eyed daughter, whom he had obligingly disrobed. Pukka Sahib O'Toole, after throttling a brace of leopards with his bare hands, had reached the granite door, only to find the Mad Maharajah of . . .

For a few thousand words, the plane hummed steadily on its course. Then it landed at Calcutta. The door opened. The Englishman and the other passengers went out. Joe and the turbanned native were left alone. And suddenly—just as Doctor Krishna raised his septic scalpel over Lady Patricia's temptingly displayed anatomy—Joe realized that the native was *up to something.*

Carefully, he edged around to catch the man's reflection in a window. The fellow had opened the top of his umbrella. He had taken a thermos bottle from its baggy folds. From the bottle, he had extracted a chilled cobra—which he was slipping stealthily into the Englishman's briefcase.

It was a familiar situation; Pukka Sahib O'Toole had encountered it on at least two occasions. The

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torpid serpent, thawing out, would soon be ready for its unwitting victim.

But Joe didn't make a move. The native gathered up his umbrella and bustled out; then the Englishman and the other passengers returned; then the engines were warmed up. And Joe kept right on pretending to read.

The instant the wheels left the ground, however, he grabbed the Englishman's arm breathlessly. "Pardon *me*, Mac—"

The Englishman gave Joe a cold, grey look. "We have not been introduced," he said.

"Gadge is the name," blurted Joe, "and there's a cobra in your briefcase!"

The Englishman raised an eyebrow. "Indeed?"

"Gosh, yes! That native back of you—"

The Englishman seemed vaguely irritated. "Ghat Singh, the silly ass!" he grumbled. "Been trying to do me in for years. Cobras, cobras, cobras—they get dreadfully tiresome!"

He removed the cobra, which was beginning to squirm and hiss, and carried it off to the washroom to dispose of it. On the way back, he apologized to an elderly Turkish lady, who had become alarmed. Resuming his seat, he remarked that it had been jolly decent of Joe to tell him about the beast.

Flushing, Joe told him to think nothing of it.

"First trip out?" asked the Englishman.

"Yup!" replied Joe. "I'm after a ruby. I'm goin' to find me an idol with a big one in his eye."

"My word! Are you really? Glad to hear it—so few doing it nowadays. Getting harder. Commercialization — independence — dacoits —all that sort of nonsense." He snorted. "Where d'you plan to try?"

Joe said he'd ask his way around after he got there—and then he explained all about Uncle Morton, and Daisy, and *Slithery Jungle Stories*.

The Englishman listened very politely, and when Joe had finished he gave him some valuable advice about watching out for dacoits. After that, the conversation lapsed until they left the plane at Rangoon. There, just as they were parting company, he hurriedly pressed a visiting card into Joe's hand. "Old saying—one good turn —all that, you know. Ah—best place to try—on back of card. Lots of idols. Any difficulty, just mention my name. May help a bit, what?"

With that, he vanished into a waiting limousine.

Joe glanced down at the piece of pasteboard. *Lieutenant-General Sir Hartwell Kelpie-Herringbone,* he read, *K.C.M.G., K.C.I.E., K.C.S.I., etc. Chief of the Imperial Secret Service.* (Only *Imperial* had been neatly crossed out

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and *Commonwealth* written in.)

"Gee!" he whispered. Turning the car over, he found a pencilled note: *Mr. Gadge, the bearer, is a pukka sahib. Extend him every courtesy—Herringbone.*

And up in a corner, a single word was written: *Mrauk-nat.*

Joe was delighted to discover that Mrauk-nat was a village barely thirty miles up the river from Rangoon, and that a bus ran two-thirds of the way. The first thing next morning, he set out, carrying a box lunch and a neat little pry-bar he had bought in a surplus shop back in Scranton. The bus jiggled and joggled, and monkeys threw things at it from the surrounding jungle, but Joe enjoyed the ride anyhow. He got off at a side road, saw a sign saying MRAUK-NAT—9 MI., and started walking.

He reached the village shortly after eleven o'clock, and found it very poorly gotten up. A few primitive huts, a couple of moth-eaten pagodas, a broken-down service station—and that was all. He tried asking some of the natives about idols, but all they did was grin and point to the station. So he wandered over, and, sure enough, in the shady spot behind the grease-rack, he found an aged native reading the Rangoon *Gazette.*

This native, who was obviously a monk, wore a yellow robe like Joe had read about. He also wore big horn-rimmed spectacles and a straw hat with a frayed red and blue band.

"Howdy, Reverend. Mind if I join you?" Joe seated himself on a five-gallon can. "You couldn't tell me where I could find me an idol with a ruby in its eye, could you?"

The native lowered his paper, gave Joe the once-over, and said, "Bloody tourist!"

Joe turned red, and felt very uncomfortable. He wished the Englishman was there—and suddenly he remembered the card tucked away in his billfold. Fumbling it out, he handed it to the native, who was smirking unpleasantly.

The native took the card. He read it. His smirk dissolved. "My dear sir," he said very respectfully, "I am U Kaw. In the Affair Of The Gaekwar's Ears, the General-sahib saved my life. I am afraid that I must be of service to you."

Joe wasn't surprised, because such things were always happening in *Slithery Jungle Stories.* He told U Kaw that he was pleased to meet him, and passed him a devilled-egg sandwich out of the box lunch. When all the sandwiches were gone, he repeated his original question.

"How large a ruby did you have in mind?" asked U Kaw.

Joe indicated something about the size of a pingpong ball.

"Tsk-tsk. Everybody wants the pocket size nowadays." U Kaw sighed. "Commercialization, you

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know. You couldn't use a bigger one, could you?"

Joe gave him to understand that there'd be no objection.

"Well, that makes it simpler. Walk on up the road till you come to the third ruin on the left. There's a bit of a path there. Follow it through the jungle until you see a big deserted temple. The idol's right in back."

Joe thanked the native for these directions, and shook hands with him; and U Kaw said, "It was nice knowing you," rather sadly. Then Joe started off again, and presently he found the temple right where it was supposed to be.

Doctor Krishna would have liked that temple. It was quite overgrown by the steaming jungle, and serpents hissed in its dank crevices. But Joe didn't let that stop him. Carefully avoiding the cobras, kraits, centipedes, and scorpions, he made his way to the rear entrance—and there stood an enormous idol with dozens of squirming arms, a horrid frown, and one huge red eye.

Joe was pleased to see that the eye was a magnificent ruby about the size of a medium grapefruit. Taking the pry-bar out of his pocket, he scrambled up the arms, climbed out on a protruding lower lip, and set to work. It took him until around two o'clock to loosen the ruby, extract it, and scrape off a label that said, *J. Chatterjee & Co., Credit Jewelers, Bombay.* Once or twice, something screamed dismally in the rank foliage, but nobody came around to bother him. Finally, stowing the ruby in the empty lunch box, he started back.

Joe walked briskly. He stopped at Mrauk-nat to show U Kaw the ruby, but the service station was closed and he couldn't find him anywhere. So he took to the road again, and everything went well for about five miles.

Then he caught sight of the first dacoit.

There wasn't much to see—a patch of sleek brown skin, a bit of loincloth—but a shiver ran up Joe's spine. Holding to the middle of the road, he put on speed, and soon he became aware of quite a number of the nasty fellows following him. All the rest of the way, he heard them signalling each other with their low, penetrating cries. But he wasn't too alarmed, because he knew of their decided preference for getting at their victims through a bedroom window.

On the bus, Joe felt of the ruby every few minutes, wishing that Daisy was there to see it. He had left a full page letter, with her landlady, explaining his system and that he was leaving. So, even though he hadn't said goodbye, maybe she'd meet him at the airport when he got back. Gee! He

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could just see her now, with a fresh new Perma-Bleach making her look like a real blonde! He'd cable her before he left, that's what he'd do.

By the time he reached his hotel, he had the words of the cable all made up—and the last thing he expected to find was a cable waiting for him.

The Eurasian desk clerk gave it to him with his room key and an oily smile. "The Consulate sent it over this P.M.," he explained. "I hope, sir, that it will be good news, yes?"

"Sure," grinned Joe, opening the message. "Guess it's from my girl."

It was, too. At least, it was from Daisy. And Joe read it at a gulp: I GOT YOUR NOTE YOU SCREWBALL. DON'T COME BACK. (SIGNED) MRS. HERMAN SLOTTERBECK.

The clerk rubbed his hands together. "It is happy good news, yes?"

"Drop dead!" snarled Joe, and headed for the stairs.

Sitting on the edge of his bed, he felt as if his world had burned out all its bearings. Various more or less practical ideas came to him—He'd send the ruby back to Daisy express collect, and become a Buddhist monk like Pukka Sahib O'Toole's brother Algernon had done. He'd hunt up Lieutenant-General Kelpie-Herringbone, join the service, and perish obscurely for what was left of the British Raj. He'd . . .

Trying to forget, Joe spent the evening taking in an embarrassing French movie with Burmese subtitles. And somehow, while he was watching it, his despair flickered out, leaving him defiant and determined. He'd show them! He'd drive around in a SUPER-EXECUTIVE convertible with white side-wall tires, and take glamor artists' models out to all the topless night-spots. He wouldn't even look at Daisy. He'd . . .

When Joe returned to his room, he was going to the dogs with a mad laugh on his lips, whiskey by the gallon, wild women by the bedfull, and a repentant Daisy sobbing bitterly in her half of a duplex background. He was doing it so intensely that he absent-mindedly went to bed, and goodness only knows what might have happened if the low cry of a dacoit hadn't snapped him back to reality just as he was dozing off. In a flash, he was out of bed, remembering how Pukka Sahib O'Toole had handled several similar crises.

The cry came again, blood-curdling nearer. In a minute or two, Joe knew, a dacoit would come creeping silently along the wide veranda, silken noose in hand. There was no time to lose. Swiftly, in the mysterious moonlight, he wadded up a blanket and some towels, fixed them to resem-

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ble a sleeping figure, rearranged the mosquito netting. Then, dropping the ruby into a convenient sock, he opened the big window that led to the veranda and crouched behind it.

He wasn't scared; he knew perfectly well that no dacoit ever got the better of a sahib who was ready for him. Tensing his muscles, he hefted the ruby-weighted sock. He heard the dacoit's hissing breath as the fellow paused to size things up. He saw a hand appear—a coiling noose—a round black head—and—

And, with a short, sharp swing, Joe brought the ruby down on the dacoit's noggin—*smack!* like that!

The dacoit went limp. Joe pulled him in and locked the window. Switching on the light, he quickly deprived him of a big sharp knife, trussed him with his own noose, and dragged up a chair so he could watch him till he woke up.

He was an ugly little man about ten years older than Joe. Presently he stirred, opened an eye, closed it again, and said, "Where am I?" in a headachey voice. Then he looked at Joe and muttered, "Oh, it's you!" rather sullenly.

"Hey!" Joe was taken aback. "You speak English!"

"Sure," said the dacoit. "I worked for OWI in the Tojo war." And he let loose a string of cuss words which proved his knowledge of the language. "Look, bud," he complained, "you couldn't let up on these cords a bit, could you?"

Joe said he couldn't.

"You might as well," groaned the dacoit. "You're stuck with me for a long time. You haven't killed me, so I'm your slave for life."

"What is this?" demanded Joe. "I don't want no slave!"

"You think I like it any better than you do?" sneered the dacoit. "It's in the rules, that's all."

"What rules?"

"The rules of being a dacoit. It's just like this fool bedroom window business, and making low, penetrating cries, and all the rest of it."

Then Joe recalled the dacoit Pukka Sahib O'Toole had caught when he was chasing The Nameless Fakir With The Ivory Hand. He was called Ba Tin Taw, and he had been faithful to the death.

"Would you be faithful to the death?" asked Joe.

"Sure," said the dacoit glumly.

"Well, okay then." Joe leaned over and began untying the silken cord. "What's your name?"

"Just call me Hubert, boss." The dacoit sat up, rubbing his head ruefully. He bummed a cigarette off Joe, and said, "What's next on the agenda? Where do we go from here?"

"Me, I'm goin' back to Scranton," Joe told him. "You—gosh, I don't know."

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Hubert looked troubled. "There's a GI I'd sure hate to run into. I lost a lot of dough to him playing poker, and he'd try to collect. I don't recollect where he came from, except it began with an S. Could've been Scranton."

Joe laughed. "Or Schenectady or Seattle or St. Louis! It's a big country. You don't need to worry. Anyhow, it's a cinch you can't come along. Not without any passport."

"Don't worry about me, boss. I'll get in. I'll fix up like a Filipino." Hubert grinned. "Fructuoso Pambid—that's me. Valet, chauffeur, general factotum. Say, I think I'll get a real bang out of it!"

Joe thought it over a minute, and then he said it would be all right if Hubert could manage it. So they shook hands on the deal. Joe decided that Hubert was a pretty good guy, for a native, and he let him in on his plans for going to the dogs in a big way.

Hubert took kindly to the idea, hinting that he could be pretty helpful when it came to arranging little details. "And if you want to fix that Herman Slotterbeck, but good," he told Joe, "you just show me his bedroom window."

Joe hastily assured him that he didn't want any rough stuff. "Anyhow," he said, "we got more important things to work on. First—" He pointed at his new servant's loincloth. "—you can't run around Scranton dressed like that."

Hubert promised to pick himself up a couple of suits while it was still dark. And Joe, though he didn't exactly approve, thought it better not to interfere. "When'll I see you?" he asked, giving Hubert back his noose and knife.

Hubert got up to go. "How about New York? Out in front of Carnegie Hall? Say a couple of hours after the plane gets in? I'll give you back the ruby then."

"What you mean—give me *back* the ruby?"

"Boss," said Hubert patiently, "you couldn't sneak that rock through Customs in a month of Sundays." He looked hurt. "What's the use of being your slave if you don't trust me?"

So Joe handed over the ruby in its sock.

It didn't astonish Joe to discover that the Filipino steward aboard the plane was really Hubert in disguise. Nor did it surprise him to find his servitor waiting for him with the ruby out in front of Carnegie Hall. He thanked him very nicely for doing such a good job, and then they set off together to sell it.

Against Hubert's advice, Joe tried two or three large stores on Fifth Avenue, and he couldn't understand why the clerks seemed scared of him. Finally, though, he let Hubert take the lead, and they

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went up to the seventh floor of a musty old building, where they found a door that said: *Lizardo Freres. Paris, London, Geneva, Rome. Crown Jewels Our Speciality.*

It didn't look like much of a place. There were two large vaults, and several steel doors which had to be unlocked to let you through. And there were three men in morning coats and striped trousers, with very polished manners and hard, expressionless eyes.

"I want to sell a ruby," said Joe.

The three men looked at each other. "Down the street," said the tallest. "We buy only the best."

Joe gestured at Hubert to unwrap the ruby, and the three faces became even more expressionless at the sight of it.

"How much?" asked the next tallest.

"Gee, Mr. Freres, I don't know," said Joe.

There was another exchange of hard glances. Then the smallest spoke. "Two million," he snapped. "Not a penny more."

"O-okay," gulped Joe.

The three men became very friendly. They wrote Joe out a check, and invited him to drop by anytime he was in town, and all three of them bowed him to the door.

All the way to the airport, Joe wondered if maybe he mightn't have gotten another million if he'd held out for it, but Hubert told him not to fret, that two was quite all right. So, as soon as they reached Scranton, he headed straight for the First National and opened a checking account, saving out a few thousands for incidentals such as a lemon-yellow SUPER-EXECUTIVE convertible sedan and a uniform for Hubert.

Luckily, the first store they tried had a snazzy green outfit almost in Hubert's size, and the car rental joint down the street had a big Classyflex which would do fine for driving up to the factory in.

"Boy-oh-boy!" chuckled Joe, as Hubert held the back door open for him. "Mr. Bulstrode'll be plenty surprised when I pay him cash on the line for that bus." He sat back, lit a six-bit cigar, and waited while Hubert turned out onto the boulevard. "And on the way back we'll find me a real wicked woman. How about a platinum blonde? Sort of like Daisy, only with them big eyelashes they fasten on special, and a little smaller around—" He patted his hip pocket. "—down here?"

"Sure," said Hubert. "Why not?"

"Well, Daisy's a blonde too, most of the time. Maybe a brunette'd be better. With awful red lips and black lace watchamacallums and—"

"Whee-*wheeew!*" said Hubert. "Or a redhead. A hot little half-

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pint. You know, kind of Frenchy." Joe shook his head. "It sure is hard to decide."

"With two million bucks?" snorted Hubert. "Why not all three? Shoot the works, boss! Then she'll *really* be sorry!"

Joe blushed—but he had to admit that Hubert was right. All of a sudden, he could see Daisy. She was reading a tabloid on the Lunchette counter—there were great big red headlines with his picture right undert hem—RICH PLAYBOY JILTS ACTRESS, *Says 'Women Are Nothing But Toys!'* Daisy was crying. And outside, drunk as a skunk, with a slick cover-girl on his lap and one on each side, he was riding along with Hubert blowing the horn like anything—

"Why, the dirty son of a gun!" Joe sat up sharply.

"Who?" Hubert was startled. "Come again, boss?"

"Herman! Makin' her work, even though she's married! The cheapskate! I'll bet you she's still got her job down to Ed's Lunchette! Turn off to the right three blocks down. It's about half a mile. We'll go take a look!"

Uneasily, Hubert mumbled something about their not having much time, that they had to go buy a car *and* pick up three women, and was Joe going soft on the deal?

"Me? Ha-ha-ha!" Joe laughed a real bitter laugh, like Pukka Sahib O'Toole the time he was turned down by Doctor Krishna's mysterious half-sister. "I just want to —er—gloat."

Hubert said that was better, and stepped on the gas, and soon they were rolling past Ed's Lunchette, with its big sign saying *Pig On A Bun.*

"Go 'round the corner and park," ordered Joe. "I'll wait in the car while you check on if she's there."

Hubert obeyed. He took a good squint at Joe's photo of Daisy, and took off. And Joe settled back to think of the redhead, and of whether to get each one a separate apartment, and of little matters like that. He'd just about made up his mind to set them all up in a house right across from the Slotterbeck duplex when Hubert returned.

"She's there, all right." The dacoit looked pretty glum.

"I thought so!" crowed Joe.

Hubert shuffled his feet. "Boss," he said slowly, "I don't know that I ought to be telling you this. I've a hunch it'll foul everything up. But—but that guy's *really* cheap. He—he didn't even buy her a ring."

"A ring?"

"A wedding ring, boss."

"Hey, wait!" shouted Joe. *"No woman would—"*

"That's right." Miserably, Hubert nodded. "I guess she just isn't married."

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Because it had been a similar incident that had sent Pukka Sahib O'Toole's brother Algernon packing off to his Buddhist monastery, Joe soon figured out that Herman had faked the cablegram to get him out of the way.

He thought about it and got madder and madder. He forgot about the pin-up artists' models. He paid no attention when Hubert suggested that maybe he ought to try going to the dogs for a week or so anyway just to see how he liked it. He wouldn't even stop to see Daisy.

There was only one thing Joe wanted right then, and that was to push Herman Slotterbeck's face in. He shoved Hubert out of the driver's seat, climbed over, and made a U-turn on two wheels. Then he tromped the throttle clean down to the floorboard.

It was quite a ride. Whenever he came to a red light or a tangle of traffic, Joe just bit the cigar and went barreling on through, muttering. In no time at all, there they were at the duplex.

Herman Slotterbeck was out in front with his shirt off, watering the lawn. At the screech of the brakes, he looked up sort of surprised, and stood there squinting and scratching.

Joe leaped out of the car, squaring off as he came. "Steal my girl, huh?" he growled. "You big ape!"

Herman backed off, looking stupid.

"You heard me!" Joe shouted, dropping into a crouch and cocking his right. "Stand up and fight like a man!"

Herman blinked.

"You're scared!" snarled Joe. "Come on and—"

Abruptly, Herman's big jaw thrust forward. His small eyes bugged out. And—

"YOU!" he roared. *"SO IT'S YOU!"*

But he wasn't even looking at Joe. He was looking over Joe's shoulder.

"Hey! Wh-what is this?" stuttered Joe.

Herman brushed him aside. "You keep out of this, nitwit! I'm going to collect from that monkey!" He strode down to the car, and reached in for Hubert. "COME OUT HERE, YOU!"

Hubert came out, looking sheepish. "Gee, boss," he told Joe, "I said we shouldn't come to this town. This is that guy I was telling you of."

"WHERE'S MY DOUGH?" bellowed Herman. "I'LL TAKE YOU APART!"

Joe was pretty confused, but he remembered one thing. In such situations, it was important to keep *cool as ice.* That was how Pukka Sahib O'Toole always won out in the end.

Herman was shouting more threats, and Hubert was protesting that he had only eight bucks and some chicken feed. And Joe

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saw that he couldn't settle with Herman till things cleared up.

"I'll pay it," he said, cool as ice.

"You?" sneered Herman. "You couldn't pay peanuts!"

"Boss, don't you do it!" Hubert was suddenly frantic. "I thought we were playing for fun! Honest, boss, *please*—"

"Silence, slave!" ordered Joe; and the dacoit subsided, making the funniest faces but not saying a word. Then Joe took out his check-book, and showed it to Herman, who was very impressed. "How much does he owe you?" Joe asked.

Herman fished in his billfold. "I got his old IOU," he grunted, "right here. Three hundred and ninety-two thousand, four hundred and seventeen dollars, twelve cents. He kept losing and losing, and me—I'm a sport—I give him a chance to get even."

Joe gulped. But he knew that no sahib ever went back on his word, to a native especially—and that he'd still have a lot of cash left.

Herman was rubbing his hands together, and explaining how the cable was only a practical joke, and asking them into the house. So Joe ignored Hubert's grimaces, and followed him in. Looking around, he saw that it wasn't such a bad little place after all.

Right then, he got an idea. He winked at his servant, and pulled out his pen. He was cooler than ever.

"I been thinkin' it over," he said, smiling a hard, thin-lipped smile. "If I pay you this dough, will you promise to go to Australia and never come back?"

"It's okay by me, Joey-boy," leered Herman. "They got swell women there."

"In Australia," Joe went on, "you won't be needin' your duplex. You can deed it to me."

"Sure, sure," agreed Herman, licking his chops and keeping an eye on the check-book.

"You got a phone?" asked Joe. "Yeah? All right, you sit down while I make some calls."

Herman sat down.

First, Joe phoned a lawyer to come over and fix up the deed. Then he made reservations for Herman clear through to Australia. After that, he told Hubert to stop making faces and help Herman pack. But he didn't give Herman the check for three hundred and ninety-two thousand, four hundred and seventeen dollars, twelve cents till an hour or two later, when the deed was all signed, and Herman's bags were stowed in a cab at the door.

As the cab pulled away, Joe couldn't resist the temptation to yell, "Don't come back, screwball!" And, even though Herman's feelings didn't seem a bit hurt, he felt pretty good when he went back into the house.

Hubert was blubbering away in a living room chair.

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"Well, for Pete's sake!" said Joe, slapping him on the back. "What's wrong with you? My system worked swell. We got rid of *that* guy; *this* duplex is worth twelve-thirteen thousand; and we got plenty besides."

"Boss," Hubert groaned, "I've been *trying* to tell you! You—you just wouldn't let me! You *forgot* something!"

"Wh-what?" asked Joe, somewhat taken aback.

"Income tax," moaned Hubert.

For a long minute, Joe simply stood there. He didn't need to keep cool as ice. He felt much too shivery. Then, very slowly indeed, he went back to the phone. He closed the door behind him. He called up a number downtown. And when he came back, he sat down without looking at Hubert.

"After I pay all I've got to them both," he said in a dead sort of voice, "both Federal and State, I'll still owe 'em money."

Hubert choked slightly.

"Unless," Joe continued, "I got married right away quick. Then I'll still have some left. I'll have —" He looked down at a note he had made. "—eighteen hundred and twenty-two bucks."

"*And* the duplex," said Hubert.

"Yeah," muttered Joe.

"Well, *it could be lots worse*, boss," Hubert said, trying hard to seem cheerful. "At least you've got me. Do you want I should drive you down to the lunch joint?"

Joe thought for a minute. Then, "Yeah, sure," he said. "But first maybe you'd better change back to your clothes. If Daisy was to see you like that, she'd maybe get funny ideas."

Joe and Daisy are married, and Joe has his job back again, on Station 32-A. They live in the duplex, and every night, after supper, Daisy reads aloud for a couple of hours out of *Slithery Jungle Stories*. And each Christmas they get a swell card from Sir Hartwell, only it's usually in code.

But they aren't doing too badly. Hubert has Herman's old job on Station 32-B, and he rents the other half of the duplex. Pays his rent, too.

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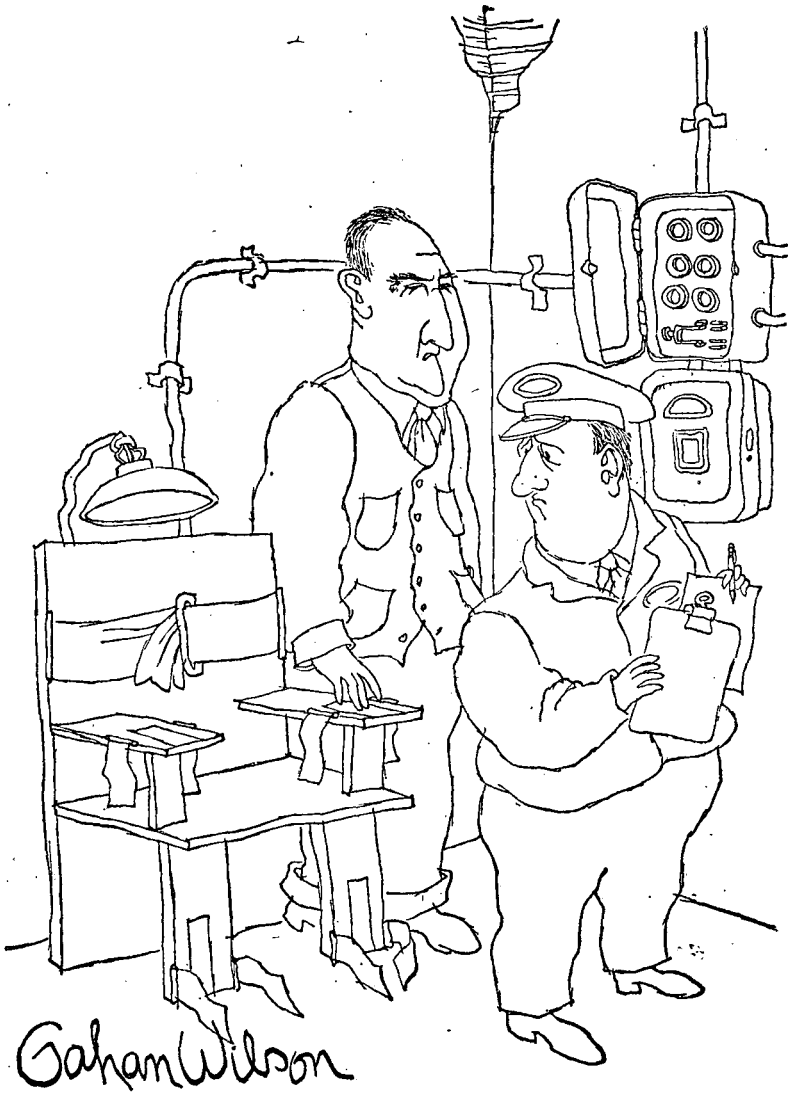

"Your only worry is the bill, Jack."

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The plot to assassinate Authority was intricate, but Dorn, Ezve and the other conspirators were loyal and well trained. What they did not realize was that Ezve held in her genes a secret which threatened them all.

AGAINST AUTHORITY

by Miriam Allen deFord

AS HE SLIPPED INTO THE ROOM, she gazed at him in dismay.

"What are you doing here, Dorn?" she gasped. "Go away!"

"You mean you're through with me, Ezve?" His voice shook.

"What do you think?" she asked coldly. "I've found out you're a rebel—a criminal. I never want to see you again. If you don't go at once I'll call the IOS."

"Oh, Ezve!" But he made no attempt to persist. As quietly as he had come he left.

He stood silently outside the door until she scratched lightly on its inner surface. Then for the second time he applied her fingerprint pass she had lent him and came in again.

"Was I all right?" she asked.

"Wonderful. You couldn't have done it better."

The Beam was off now, and the recorders had stopped humming.

"Now they'll be sure you're not one of us, and if we're caught you can say I kidnapped you."

"I won't! I never would!"

"Oh, yes, you will, my girl, or else I really *will* go away without you. I refuse to take you along unless I'm sure you'll be protected.

Ezve kept her own council. All she said was: "What's next?"

"We wait here for Galef."

"How do we hide till he comes? They might turn on the Beam."

"I've worked that out. Follow me—quietly, darling."

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In their soft-soled sandals they slithered across the room and into the kitchen. Beside the food-order panels stood the gaping mouth of the disposal unit. Lithe as a panther, he slid into it and held out his arms for her. She shrank back.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "We can't —we'll fall!"

"No, we won't. There's a platform at each story for the repair robots."

Reluctantly she let him pull her in and hold her close against him. It was cramped and uncomfortable. He braced himself on the narrow ledge against the side of the chute. If they slipped, they would fall straight into the macerator below; Dorn tried not to think of it and hoped Ezve had forgotten it. Several times waste from above her 40th-story compartment brushed them in its downward fall; when they heard it coming they hid their heads on each other's shoulders.

They kept listening alertly. It was impossible to tell from their position whether night had come or not. The waiting seemed endless, though actually it could not be more than two hours; their muscles ached and they could shift only a little to ease the strain.

At last Galef's signal sounded on the rear window, they dared not risk the heliport on the roof. Cautiously Dorn lifted himself up and glanced around. Sure that the Beam and the recorders were off, he helped Ezve out of the disposal chute and followed her. They both staggered a bit as they hurried toward the copter hovering outside in the darkness. For a moment Dorn had the shocked sensation that the pilot was not Galef; then he realized that the strange face peering at them as they opened the window was only one of the masks they all wore, for what they were worth, during meetings, to evade stray intrusions of the Beam. Galef helped them in and the copter darted away at once.

Galef was in a vile temper. He spoke to neither of them and kept glancing in a surly way at Ezve as she and Dorn adjusted their masks. He and Dorn had almost come to blows already over Dorn's insistence that he would not join the project without her. Under the circumstances, Dorn would have ignored him, but Ezve's nerves were rasped by the long frightened wait. She turned to him angrily.

"What's eating you, Galef?" she snapped. "Are you afraid I'm going to betray us?"

Galef only grunted. Dorn touched her arm but she was not to be stopped.

"Because I'm one of Authority's thousand or so children, I assume. Well, I'm only a test-tube daughter, and my mother never saw Authority in her life. I hate him as much as you do. More—if you'd ever studied ancient history as I have you'd know that 500 years

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ago there was a psychologist named Froud or Fried or something like that who demonstrated clearly that daughters always hate their fathers!"

Galef laughed unpleasantly.

"I *have* studied ancient history," he said sourly, "and you've got it all wrong. It's sons who hate their fathers and daughters who hate their mothers. Anyway, that stuff all belongs back in the Barbaric Age when children were born unselectedly."

Ezve, piqued, was silent. After a long pause Galef growled, "And that's not my reason, either," and would say no more.

The man universally known as Authority suffered from only one limitation of his supreme power—there was no one on Earth who was his equal, with whom he could consult on even terms or ask for advice. His only mode of communication with his fellow-beings was for him to give orders and for them to obey. His was the absolute loneliness of the dictator.

As a person he was not very impressive. He was rather short, slight, and bald; he wore permanent contact lenses and an implanted hearing aid. He had been young when he came to power; now he was probably in his sixties—nobody knew any exact personal facts about him.

He had not asked or wanted to become Authority. Left to himself, he would have wished for another duty. But of course circumstances could never leave him to himself, and continuance of the System (which involved continuance of his own life) was vital if the Civilization Plan was to succeed.

Forty-eight years ago the Pelagerians had arrived from their unknown planet, proffered gifts of superior knowledge, met with panicky aggression, and after two years of effort and struggle had left their dead behind them and departed again. Their legacy had been planet-wide civil war between the panicked and the persuaded, until every government save one had gone down in anarchy, and Earth seemed doomed to retrogression into the fabled Dark Ages of the old pre-atomic days.

That one government that survived was, by an odd concatenation of circumstances, the Republic of New Turkey. And the man now known as Authority had been the leader, sprung up from obscurity, who had kept it firm and slowly, gradually, brought the frightened rulers of all the rest into what was at first a mere skeleton league to try to restore order. Only a dictator had been able to exercise that power; and a dictator who still must for a while longer by his sole command keep a convalescent civilization going until the next step in the Plan. Then at last he might be relieved.

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To be born of the seed of Authority had become the world's highest honor. Authority was indeed in some sense the father of the New Era. He had no idea of the identity or even the number of his test-tube children.

He sat now in the insulated office connected by a secret door to his personal compartment above it. He lived as austerely as any of his people. The communicator clicked, and he switched it on, non-visually, because the click had been in a signal for a report from an agent. The tape ran out smoothly:

"Subjects 397X, 7842X, unknown girl coptering my compartment, thence prime headquarters. 22A45."

Authority opened a safe to which only he had the combination, took out two code books, one for subjects, the other for agents. 397X, Galef; 7852X, Dorn: full information concerning each. He frowned; there should be no such thing as an "unknown girl"; nobody was or could be unknown. He consulted the other book: 22A45, First Rank Agent Arcil.

Authority returned the books to the safe and alerted the Internal Order Squad.

Arcil was their natural leader. The plot to assassinate Authority was intricate, and it took a trained mind to detail and implement it. Besides, he had recruited them all, personally or through Galef. The only identity unknown to him was Ezve's. But when it came to the point of action, an elderly professor or Classic Existentialism at the University of Ankara was out of his element. What was required was someone young, intelligent, devoted, and physically skilled, with experience of a kind professors do not have. After long search, that meant Dorn. It was Galef, Dorn's lifelong friend and Arcil's own nephew, who had suggested him.

When Dorn, Ezve, and Galef arrived at Arcil's compartment, they found no one else there. The rest of the top-level conspirators were waiting, he told them, at their secret headquarters—Arcil's own lecture hall at the university, to the use of which outside of class hours he was legitimately entitled. Because most of them were students, he had pointed out, in case of inquiry he could always say that this was a seminar he was conducting for the benefit of those unable to attend his regular courses because of their political duties: every citizen of the world-wide community had such duties assigned to him or her, the equivalent of army service in pre-Pelagerian days—though of course there were no opposition parties in the old sense. Arcil's lecture hall was the one place where they felt safe and were able to relax; they could rely on Arcil's protection.

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As the three of them entered his compartment now, Arcil raised his eyebrows at the sight of Ezve, and glanced meaningly at Galef, who shrugged. Under the professor's benevolent white beard, his jaws snapped shut in annoyance.

"Why are we meeting here first?" Dorn accosted him.

"Because I have things to tell you that I want only you and Galef to hear," Arcil replied blandly.

"Don't we know everything already?" Dorn's voice was stiff.

"Certainly not. There are details that could not be told until the last minute, for fear the wrong person might hear about them."

"Meaning that I might talk too much?"

"Young man, why are you so touchy? You have known me since you were a child; Galef has vouched for you as the most suitable instrument for our great deliverance. You would never have been recruited otherwise."

"I'll tell you why he's so touchy," Ezve burst out. "It's because you're ignoring me."

Arcil turned his keen eyes upon her.

"And just who *are* you," he said, "and why has he brought you here? Dorn knows very well that this, like all our meetings, is secret."

"Ezve and I are not to be separated," Dorn answered for her. "I will do nothing without her."

"She is a child of Authority!" Galef blurted out.

"On one side," Ezve said smoothly, "and a test-tube child only. On the other side—my mother was half Pelagerian. Yet I am completely with you."

There was a shocked silence. Only Dorn had known that. There had been rumors enough that before the Pelagerians left they had planted their seed. But they were only rumors, for the general opinion was that, humanlike as the Pelagerians were, they could not interbreed with humans. Even Arcil, usually impassive, seemed taken back. Then he took command again.

"And what does your heredity signify?" he inquired icily.

"It is a great advantage to us," Dorn said eagerly. "The capacity and complexity of her brain are by scientific analysis three times as great as ours. In every emergency in the four years since we first met, I have found Ezve's advice invaluable; it has saved my life more than once. . . . And besides," he added with a sheepish smile. "she's my girl."

"Very well," Arcil said briskly after a moment of meditation, "It may even help to have two instead of one of you to carry out our plan. "Now here are the final instruction."

They listened intently, for no notes could be taken—they must remember every perilous move.

"Do you understand fully?"

"Yes," they both said.

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"Can you do it—together, since that's the way you want it?"

"Yes."

Arcil rose. "All right then, we'll copter to my lecture hall and alert the others."

He led the way to the heliport, where his own three-man copter waited beside Galef's. Then he paused suddenly.

"I hadn't known that we would have—Ezve, is it?—with us. I'd counted on having Galef pilot us—I don't drive any more, but I prefer my own car. You go ahead, Galef, take them in and then come back for me."

He re-entered his compartment, a rather grim smile on his face as he pressed the communicator button. He had been worried about how to get them away without him.

At Arcil's lecture hall a dozen young men and women awaited them. Galef knew them all; he introduced Dorn to the few he had not met, and Ezve to all of them.

"As soon as Arcil gets here, we'll get started to our posts," he said. I'll take my copter and go back for him now. We had to make two tries of it because of her."

He glared at Ezve as he passed her.

"Why does he hate me so, Dorn?" she murmured.

"He's just jealous," Dorn said lightly. "We've been pals all our lives—we used to do everything together, now I do everything with you."

"I didn't mean to come between you," she said, distressed.

"Don't fret, darling. He'll get over it. We have more important things to think of now."

The masked conspirators waited, talking nervously in low tones among themselves. Time went on. Galef did not return, with or without Arcil. They began to be uneasy.

What arrived at last was not Arcil. It was the IOS—the Internal Order Squad.

Ezve, with her sharp ears, heard the characteristic hum of their copters first. She caught Dorn's eye, and moved her hand in their private warning. It was too late to hope to save the others. Very quietly they slipped out of the door and into the hall outside, just as the heliport door opened.

"Where to?" Dorn whispered.

"Remember?" she whispered back.

She pointed down the deserted hallway to the utility room at the end. It would have a disposal unit in it. Neither of them dared to think of the others left behind—or, for the moment, of how their betrayal had come about.

Once more they clung together on the inside ledge, straining their eyes and ears.

The sounds, when they came, were ominous. All their group were trained to be silent in the

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face of disaster; but the Squad members were noisy enough. Dorn and Ezve could hear them hustling the prisoners up the ramp to the heliport. There were shouts and the thud of blows. Once there was a scream, quickly suppressed. Dorn gritted his teeth.

He was waiting for names, and at last he heard them.

"There were others here!" a Squad officer yelled. He stopped as if consulting a memorandum. "Dorn? Some girl?" Why not Galef?

There was no answer. "We'll get them!" the IOS man taunted.

Dorn started to climb out. Ezve held him back.

"*No!*" she whispered urgently. "We can't help them, and this is our only chance to go on with the plan."

"How can we, now?" he growled. "We needed the others." But he stayed.

At last all the sounds died away. It was after class hours in the university; the building seemed vacant. The robot cleaners would be along soon, but they didn't matter. Any human having business there would have been frightened off long ago by the raid. Stiffly Dorn hefted himself out of the unit and pulled Ezve up after him.

"Give me your mask," he said. "They'll be watching for those." He threw hers and his down to the macerator.

"They'll have guards posted, upstairs and down," she reminded him.

He nodded. "There's just one place they won't be looking for us —Arcil's lecture hall. Thank goodness he and Galef hadn't got back yet. We can hide there till we're sure they've given up, and decide what to do next."

"If it's not Beamed."

It wasn't. They reconnoitred and made it safely.

"No lights," Ezve warned. Dorn glanced at the time signal, shining dimly on this as on every ceiling. "Almost 21 o'clock. It's been a long day."

"And it's not over." She sank into a chair. "Don't talk for a minute. I want to think."

Dorn, too exhausted to speak, dropped down beside her and caught her hand in his. In the darkness and silence, he almost fell asleep.

Her ears were keener than his. Suddenly she grasped his shoulder. Then he too heard the soft footsteps outside.

"If it were Arcil and Galef, they'd be flying," he whispered apprehensively.

"That door there—"

"It's a supply closet, I think. Perhaps we can—"

But before they could reach it the outer door opened and the lights went on.

It *was* Arcil, alone.

"Ah, I thought this would be

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where I'd find you—I told them so," he smiled. "It seemed the logical place."

Dorn's expression changed from welcome and relief to sudden realization. He turned on Arcil fiercely.

"You—*you* betrayed us!" he cried. "You—our leader!"

"Of course. That is the only way to ferret out subversion—invite it and see who accepts."

"Galef too?" Dorn's voice was hoarse.

"No, poor Galef was shocked by news of the raid. I left him too stricken to think of piloting me back here. Naturally, he doesn't suspect me, his uncle and foster father. In fact, young lady, I imagine he's inclined to blame you."

"Me!"

"Well, the first word he uttered after the tridimens newscast was 'Ezve.'" Arcil's smile widened above the grey beard. "He tried to keep me from leaving, for fear I'd be caught too."

Dorn's voice quivered with contempt.

"I'm surprised you'd bother to come and capture us yourself! How could you tear yourself away from watching them torture the rest of us? That's what's happening to them, isn't it?"

"They're being disposed of. But the—occasion won't be complete without you, my dears."

He raised his voice. "Come in, boys," he called.

There were six of them, their paralysis guns ready. Arcil watched the two being led unresistingly away.

He sighed deeply, and pressed the communication button.

Galef sat alone in the compartment he shared with his uncle. He was badly shaken. When he had arrived to take Arcil to the meeting, the professor had curtly told him the brutal truth, and before he could make any response had departed—presumably to find a taxiplane, since he would not pilot his own. Galef felt that his faith and innocence had been cruelly betrayed. He had recruited all those young men and women, including his dearest friend, trusting in Arcil. Wasn't it Arcil who had first indoctrinated *him,* converted him to the cause, confided in him all the most secret details of the plot? And now Arcil was self-revealed as an *agent provocateur,* a traitor. Yet it was Arcil who had taken the place of a father when his own parents died when he was little more than a baby, Arcil whom he had revered and adulated and modeled himself on from boyhood. All he was spared was the knowledge of Arcil's lie about his accusation of Ezve.

Ezve! How little either she or Dorn guessed the real reason for his opposition to their joining them! The thought of what she, what all of them, must be endur-

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ing now turned him sick. If giving himself up to the IOS could have helped any of them, he would have done so at once. But now only he was left to go on with the plot.

Suddenly he remembered the day Ezve had shown him and Dorn her clever hiding-place for the paper she laughingly called her "only legacy." He didn't know what it meant, but she valued it, and so he must try to rescue it before the IOS got hold of it. It might even have some real value, and so help to save her life and Dorn's.

Galef ran up the ramp to the heliport.

In the bare cell into which he had been throw, Dorn was trying to think. As a rather recent recruit, many of the conspirators were little known to him. How many of them would break and betray their comrades under torture? How many were already traitors, as their leader had been? Above all, where was Ezve? What were they doing to her? She, he knew, would never break. Bitterly he repented the need which had made him insist that without her he would take no part in the plot, to so vital a part of which he—they—had been assigned.

The cell door swung open. Two Squadmen entered, and without a word hustled him between them out into the corridor and down it, with a great locking and unlocking of heavy doors and a long swift ascent in a suction-shaft, to an office in which sat a small tired-looking man.

The man made a gesture, and the Squad bullies withdrew. Dorn was alone with the stranger.

"Dorn," the man said. Dorn braced himself. He could not even acknowledge his name until he knew what all this was about. Involuntarily he looked about him for instruments of torture. There was nothing in the room except a desk, bearing a multi-communicator, and the chair in which the man sat. He shook himself mentally; this was childish. People of importance, as this insignificant-looking person must be, did not have to do their own dirty work. First the session to try to worm information out of him, then he would be thrown to the murderers. He kept obstinately silent, standing stiffly before the desk.

To his astonishment, the man burst out laughing.

"You look like an intelligent young fellow," he said. "Do you really believe all those monstrous stories about what happens when the IOS gets hold of prisoners?"

Dorn made no reply. The man went on. "You know who I am, don't you?"

No reply.

The little man said, almost apologetically: "I believe they call me Authority."

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For an instant Dorn was petrified with terror. All his life he had been kept in awe of the very name. He had meant to kill this man, but he had never anticipated hearing him speak. No one he had ever heard of had ever seen Authority face to face or heard his voice. The shock overcame his obstinate refusal to talk.

"If you really are Authority," he said hoarsely, "then tell me why your System keeps us in slavery? Tell me why, when your Squadmen have taken anyone away, no one ever sees him again? Where do they go, what do you do to them, if they are not tortured to death?

"Sir, " he added involuntarily, to his own surprise, as over the little man's face there struck suddenly a look of awesome dignity.

"Yes, I will tell you, Dorn. But I warn you, when I am through telling you your own future will be in your hands."

Dorn waited. Authority gazed at him in silence until Dorn against his will nodded acquiescence.

"Very well then. Yes, your rebellious group was deliberately trapped. Yes, I have agents, and Arcil is one of them. Their function is to foment rebellion, since it seems impossible to avoid it. Then when young leaders of the rebellion appear—young men and women eager and able to overthrow our System, and usually to implement their revolt by trying to assassinate me—"

Dorn started. Authority smiled.

"Who do you think works out the details of each plot? Not the so-called authors of it, who are one and all my agents—not Arcil in this case—but I myself."

"But why?" Dorn gasped.

"Because young men and women of this sort are what I—what our society—most needs. Because we are not yet ready for democratic government of this torn and decimated planet, and only through such people shall we be made ready.

"Every member of the IOS was once just such a revolutionist as you."

"You mean—"

"Yes. Those captured in a raid are screened scientifically. The ones who are found to be best fitted, like you, are brought before me and given their chance to enlist in the IOS. Squadmen do not spend all their time tracking and capturing subversives, you know—fortunately we are not in such a state of revolt as that. They are the elite of a tested and secret order which is being trained to take over as soon as society is ready to govern itself again. I hope very much that will be in my own lifetime—for my own sake as well as our world's. It is no light burden, I am weary."

"But then why is everyone—not just those you suspect, but everybody everywhere—hounded and spied upon all the time? Why are

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there recorders and the Beam, so that no one is ever sure of privacy?"

"Because we are not omniscient, and must be able to check on everyone. We cannot use and do not want blowhards or malcontents who merely grumble. We want those brave enough to defy our surveillance and smart enough to outwit it."

Dorn's head was whirling. He tried to sort out his thoughts.

"All right, say I accept all this. But what becomes of those who refuse to enter the IOS?"

"We can't let them go back to talk about what they have learned, can we? Why do you suppose that immense tract in Brazil is off limits and forbidden territory? We have a flourishing colony there, made up of people who, except for never being able to go home again, lead useful and contented lives. Many of those potential leaders, I am glad to say, are my own test-tube offspring. Some day they or their descendants will form the nucleus of a new self-governing society.

"You are not by any chance one of my sons, are you?"

"No, but my—"

Authority interrupted him.

"Well, you will say, what of the misfits and weaklings who cannot face jungle hardships? They are weeded out; some commit suicide some succumb to the ordeal."

"And the others—the ones who are taken in raids and screened and *not* selected to come before you and be given their choice? What happens to them?"

A look of distaste swept across Authority's lined face.

"Every movement has its fringe," he said. "They are not tortured, Dorn; that is just wild speculation and surmise. They are—put to sleep. Painlessly. There is no place for them in the Colony, and they cannot be trusted ever to return to their homes. It is harsh, but the life or death of our future is at stake.

"I must put the question to you now, Dorn. Will you join us as a dedicated member of the IOS, or shall I send you back into custody until the next planeload leaves for Brazil?"

Dorn looked Authority in the eye and said boldly:

"I don't altogether agree, but I understand your viewpoint. I am willing to concede that perhaps our attitude was rash and unthinking, and that, hard as it is, yours may be the best hope for the future.

"But when I joined the conspiracy I told them that I do nothing and go nowhere without a girl named Ezve. I got her into this and I have to get her out of it. She was captured with me. Bring Ezve before you as you have brought me. If she consents to join the IOS, so will I. If she refuses or if—" for a moment he was unable to go on—"if she is among those you have already disposed of—" He could say no more; he felt strangled.

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Authority leaned back in his chair, relaxed. He smiled broadly as he touched a button. "All right, Ezve," he said to the communicator, "You may come in now."

The door opened and a girl came in. Dorn stared at her dumfounded. She was a complete stranger. He had never seen her before in his life.

Galef landed on Ezve's heliport. But of course it would be impossible for him to enter without her fingerprint pass, or unless she herself was there to let him in—which under the circumstances was most unlikely. However, almost without thought, he knocked in the group's secret signal. Immediately the door opened.

He hardly had time to realize what a fool he had been when the Squadman caught hold of him and pulled him into the room. The Beam was on and the recorders were humming. If he had used his brain at all, he should have known that after a raid the captives' compartments would be searched and occupied.

There were two of them. The other Squadman ran to help his companion, then did a double take and pulled his captor's arm away.

"Uh-uh," he said. "That's the old man's boy. We're to let him go."

"What's he doing here, then?" the first Squadman growled. Galef had had a second in which to collect his thoughts.

"My uncle sent me to see if you needed any help, since by chance I know the conspirator whose compartment this is," he said smoothly.

"We don't need any help." That was the testy first Squadman. Again he was contradicted.

"If this gentleman knows where this person hid something we are looking for—"

Galef managed to look both puzzled and obliging. If he could find an opportunity while they were elsewhere, he might just possibly be able to abstract that paper from its hiding-place and escape with it. He became officiously helpful, making all sorts of suggestions and useless investigations. He was careful never once to let his eyes or even his mind stray in the right direction. All he needed was three minutes alone in Ezve's dressing-room. But not for a minute did they leave him to himself.

The outer door must have been deactivated when the Squadmen took over. It opened quietly to let Arcil in.

"It's no use, my boy," he said gently to his nephew. "We'll do our own searching—for Authority, not for your treasonable friends."

Ezve stood quietly in the cell into which she had been thrown after the long confusing flight, estimating its possibilities. No furniture whatever, so they couldn't expect her to be here very long. The usual service buttons were on

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the back wall. She tried them one by one to see if they worked. Food: a lighted sign saying, "Next meal 8 o'clock." The toilet facilities emerged promptly. Drinking water: the tube came out and squirted, withdrew when she pressed the "off" button; so thirst was not—or at least not yet—one of the tortures. News: The panel did not respond.

The cell was air-conditioned, of course, and equally of course it had no window; light came from luminescent panels embedded in the ceiling. It was the first ceiling she had ever seen without a time-indicator. Obviously, time was of no interest to prisoners.

The important thing was to keep her wits about her, estimate the situation coolly, and not let herself be panicked. There was no possibility of escape from the cell, so she must not waste energy in futile schemes. Above all, she must consciously drag her thoughts away from Dorn and what might be happening to him; emotional turmoil would be a disservice to them both.

Presumably someone would come sometime to take her away for interrogation. In the time she had to prepare, she must concentrate on that. She let herself down on the floor in a corner, leaning against the wall, and shut her eyes to rest and think.

Time plays tricks when it is hidden, so Ezve had no idea how long she had been in the cell when at last two Squadmen entered and dragged her out between them. She had had time enough: she had a pretty fair notion by now how to cope with any situation she might logically be expected to face.

The one thing she had not anticipated was what happened. Her guards pushed her between them, at a brisk pace, through what seemed miles of corridors and around a series of turns and angles, until they reached a huge door equipped with a multitude of electronic locks and bars. Swiftly they applied fingerprint passes to each, and the heavy door creaked open. They thrust her roughly through it, but they did not follow. Instead, she heard the door re-closing behind her, and to her utter amazement found herself outside the prison with no guard anywhere in sight.

Her first impulse was to run, to find a place where she could get her bearings and make sense of this astounding release. Caution slowed her down; quite possibly that was what they wanted her to do, and at her first step she would be shot for "trying to escape." She could almost feel the ray-bullet in her quivering back.

For long minutes she stood motionless where they had left her. Nothing happened. Then very carefully she began to edge herself into a patch of shadow cast by an overhanging ledge, then, hugging

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the bordering wall, down the wide walkway that seemed to be the only way out.

She found herself at last, after the walkway made an abrupt angle, in the Service Center of an unknown city that might be anywhere on Earth. People crowded the moving sidewalks, there were official-looking buildings on either side, the sky above was lined with traffic lanes of speeding superjets and private copters. It was broad daylight.

Ezve thought back to the moment when she and Dorn had been surprised by Arcil and he had called in the Squadmen. She was sure it was a government copter into which they had been pushed, but from then on the journey was impossible to trace. For one thing, their captors had blindfolded and handcuffed them. They certainly had made a transfer to another plane before they had landed. Had Dorn been taken away before the journey ended? She had no idea, nor had she any idea where she was now.

She was certainly not in her own city, but if she was anywhere within reaching distance of it, it might be possible to find some of their comrades who had not been caught and with whom she could take refuge. She was on the slow walkway; she stepped off at the next stopping-place and entered the lobby of a building into and from which people were going and coming. What she needed was either a printed sign or the sound of conversation, to tell her if the local language was her own, or if not, what it was. In the latter case, she could only hope it was one of the dozen she understood; she thought regretfully of her portable translator, doubtless confiscated now with all her other belongings. The one thing she was sure of was that they would not have found that paper.

Within five minutes she knew, or at least knew something. She was in an English-speaking city, and she understood and spoke English in all its contemporary dialects; but she could not be certain which was which, and this city might be anywhere from England itself to Australia.

At least there was nothing in her appearance to attract attention; nowadays, though the old languages clung on, everybody all over the world dressed alike, and populations had been so thoroughly mingled that it was no longer possible, as it had been in the past, to tell one's whereabouts from the color of the inhabitants' skin. In any event, no one noticed her, and she saw plenty of others of her own coloring.

The building turned out to be a public library, and she soon found she was in the city called New York. She settled herself in the reading room, a tape chosen at random before her, to pull

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her thoughts together. Principal among them were questions. Why had she been released in a strange city in a strange country, without money to return to her own? Why had Arcil betrayed the conspiracy, and, when she and Dorn had eluded him, returned to trap them? What had happened to Dorn?—but from that she pulled her mind away; if she was to be of any use, she must not let emotion master her.

What did interfere was the realization that she was weak from hunger; it must be 24 hours since she had eaten. When the Squadmen threw her out of the prison they had hurled after her what belongings she had had on her when she was captured, including her wallet. She searched it and found at least enough international credit notes to insure a decent meal. Ezve had seldom eaten except by dialing for food in her own or somebody else's compartment, but she knew that in every city there were public eating places for travelers. She left the library and went in search of one. In the busiest part of a big city it was not hard to find.

She changed a note for local currency, dialed for a satisfying dinner, and took her tray to a table where she could be alone. Deliberately she kept her mind on trivialities until she had finished her meal. Then, rested and revived, she set herself to thinking again, reviewing the whole bizarre affair from the time Dorn had first told her about the plot to assassinate Authority.

And slowly, concentrating on the thread that led from one episode to another, that part-Pelagerian brain of hers caught a glimmering of the startling truth. . . .

Ezve took a deep breath and rose from the table. She knew now what she must do. The first problem was to find a means of transportation back home. She had been deliberately deported to a place they thought too far away to be a danger to them in time, but she must and would outwit them.

How does one travel for thousands of miles without fare? She had no time to try to earn or beg the money. It was too risky to try to stow away in a superjet. Where in this city could she find a place where copters were parked that were capable of crossing oceans and continents and yet manageable by an ordinary pilot like herself?

For Dorn's sake she would become a criminal if she could. She could only hope fervently that she would not be too late.

It was just before dawn when the stolen copter slid into the Ankara airport, where no plane was expected at that hour, on its last ounce of fuel. Its pilot had hovered above, seeking the minute when nobody would be on watch.

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The dark-cloaked figure slipped out quietly and was lost in the shadows.

There were guards enough outside the massive building where Authority had his headquarters. One of them challenged the intruder at once.

He lowered his paralysis-gun when he realized that the masked figure was a woman. She went up to him boldly and drew a letter from her cloak.

The guard was only a guard, but he was a picked Squadman, one of the elite. He knew enough not to shoot first and think afterwards. He kept his gun steady, but he let her approach.

"Call someone trustworthy and have him take this at once to Authority," she said, in a tone of command which he recognized. "I shall wait here with you until he returns."

He hesitated a second, then signaled for one of his fellow-guards. Certainly there could be nothing to harm Authority in a piece of coiled tape, and he would keep her safe under his gunsight until he got his orders. Better that than to make a mistake the other way, with all the danger to him that might involve.

The second guard was back within five minutes. He actually saluted, and the first guard lowered his gun.

"I am to take her to Authority himself," he announced with awe.

Early as it was, Authority was already at his desk. Sometimes he was there all night. When Ezve entered, he waved her to a second chair he had had brought in. He had the guard search her for weapons, then dismissed him. Her letter, she saw, was lying before him. When they were alone, he gazed silently and intently at her for a minute, then he smiled.

"Well, daughter," he said almost casually, "tell me first how you knew."

"It had to be," she answered calmly. "There was no other possible answer."

"Spoken like one of us. And how did you arrive at that conclusion?"

"Because, as you must have guessed by now, I am far more of your blood than you knew. When I reasoned from that viewpoint, I realized that you and all your agents must be disguised full Pelagerians."

"My mistake," murmured Authority meditatively, "was in not finding and recruiting you before you became too closely affiliated with our—subjects. I have to laugh when I think the Earthmen believe our races can't interbreed—and yet every one of my thousands of test-tube children is not half-Turkish, as they think, but half-Pelagerian. I should have realized that ours are the dominant genes and that the recessive quarter you received from your mother was negligible."

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"Perhaps. But not so negligible that it prevented me from finding out."

"Ah, yes. That was when I suspected that your mother too must be part Pelagerian. But even before that, when to my amazement that —paper was traced to her and thence to you, and my men couldn't find it, I decided the safest way was to deposit you where you couldn't get back till they did.

"Again, I should have guessed. Only one of us would have had the nerve and adroitness to steal a plane in New York and pilot it back to Ankara. And frankly, the paper is still missing. Even I, you see, am not infallible."

"You may have it, if you will give me Dorn."

"Ah, Dorn. Why couldn't you have fallen in love instead with one of your own kind—say Galef?"

"I consider myself an Earthwoman. You should have seen to it that a half-Pelagerian couldn't become the mother of one of your own children."

Authority shrugged.

"I didn't know. It is 48 years since they left a few of us behind to avenge their deaths at the hands of that stupid, recalcitrant breed you claim you belong to. Eventually, thanks to my parentage, there will be so many partly of our blood that the conquest will be easy when we are ready to invade. But at the time your mother was born there should have been no such possibility."

"Tell me about Dorn." Ezve's voice rose.

"Tell *me* where the paper is. You knew we hadn't found it, or instead of sending for you just now, I'd have had you killed. You should never have had it. It was a great shock to me when I learned from Home on our secret transmitter that one copy was missing—the copy that was your grandfather's. That was when we discovered that he must have lowered himself to mate directly with an Earthwoman. And when I realized you were their grandchild, I suspected the paper had come down to you and you still had it. I ordered Arcil to get you into the conspiracy for that very reason, though I didn't dare trust even him with your identity. So if you want to put it that way, *you* are responsible for his recruiting Dorn, as a way to you.

"Galef made an attempt to find it and use it to rescue you, but he was prevented. He is a very mixed-up young man. I told Arcil it was a mistake to keep Galef in ignorance of his true ancestry, but he never trusted the boy. The consequence is that he fell in love with you."

Ezve was startled.

"So that's it!" she murmured. "I always thought he hated me. . . . Tell me about Dorn."

Authority laughed.

"You should have seen Dorn's face when I said, 'Come in, Ezve,'

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and an entirely strange girl walked up to him! He must have thought he had lost his mind. I was testing his reaction to mental shock."

"I admire your sense of humor. . . . Where is Dorn?"

For the first time the dictator lost his composure.

"Don't be a fool, daughter. There are more important matters facing us than the welfare of a young aborigine."

"Not to me. I shall not give you the paper except in exchange for him, alive and well."

"Such nonsense! Girl, be sensible! We are almost ready. We have most of the poor idiots reduced to apathy; the few who rebel we eliminate by death or exile, or the best of their leaders we assimilate into our loyal guard, the IOS—deluding them into thinking they are proponents of future democracy. In only a few years more we shall be able to signal for the Great Invasion and take over this planet and really civilize it. Would you pit all this against the fate of a wretched Earthman?"

"Dorn."

Authority sighed.

"Very well. I must have the paper. Tell me where to find it and I'll give you your Dorn."

"Dorn first."

"You're as bad as he is. He is sulking in his cell, refusing to accept my offer of a place in the IOS until I produce *you*. The rest of his lot are off to Brazil, and I can't do anything about them now. Let him believe it is the idyllic colony we pretend it is."

He laughed. Then he looked sternly at the implacable girl who was staring Authority down.

"But I warn you, Ezve, you are not going to injure our plans. If you ever tell Dorn or anyone else who we are, I shall know it, never fear, and you will both die instantly.

"And if you ever divulge to anyone on Earth what is in that paper, whether you yourself understand it or not, you will die far from instantly, and very horribly."

"I promise you I shall never tell anyone. Now bring Dorn here and I shall tell you where you can find it."

Authority gazed at her keenly.

"Have you ever told anyone in the past?"

"No one has ever seen that paper since I got it but me," Ezve said firmly, "and I have never told anyone what the figures in it are."

"Have you any idea what that formula means? How did you ever come into possession of it?"

"My mother gave it to me when she was dying. She didn't know what it meant, but her father—her Pelagerian father—had given it to her mother on *his* deathbed, and told her it was of enormous value and must be kept safely and handed down in the family, that some day it might be the most important possession anyone ever had."

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"He was a dog of a traitor," Authority said curtly. "It's lucky for him that he's dead. Your grandmother must have been a fascinating woman. But he's a traitor, just the same."

He paused an instant, his hand hovering over the communicator.

"You haven't answered my other question. Do you understand the paper?"

"I didn't, for a long time. Yes, now I do. I worked it out after I realized that you and your agents must be disguised Pelagerians."

"You would—you're almost all Pelagerian yourself. By rights, I should have you destroyed, my girl, to eliminate that knowledge. But you can't do us any harm by yourself, and I've given you my word, and you've given me yours, and no Pelagerian has ever gone back on that. Besides, I confess I have a weakness for my own progeny, even though I've never seen the mothers by whom I begot them."

"Very well." He pushed the button. "Bring the prisoner Dorn here," he said. He turned to Ezve again. "He will be here in a few minutes. Now where is the paper?"

"Turn the Beam on the door, if you have a Beam here," she answered. "When I see Dorn approaching, alive and well, I shall tell you."

"You are truly my child," Authority said wryly.

Ezve's eyes were riveted on the door, made transparent on their side by the Beam. For ten minutes they both sat in tense silence. Then she let out a little gasp and jumped to her feet, her face radiant.

"Oh, yes, the paper," she said hurriedly. "I once read, in the university, a very ancient book, made before the days of tape. It was called 'The Purloined Letter.' It told how a hidden letter was never found because it was in full sight of the searchers.

"Your paper, carelessly folded and with a shopping list scribbled on the back of it, is stuck in the dressing-room mirror of my compartment."

"And so," Ezve said to Dorn two months after they were married, "I am not breaking my word to Authority. I never promised not to tell you the truth about him and Arcil and the rest of his agents. He threatened to have us both killed if I divulged that to you—but who is to know you know it if you never tell anyone else while he is still in power?"

"And of course I never shall—not even to Galef."

"Above all not to poor Galef. It would be a terrible shock to him. Do you know, Dorn, Authority told me Galef was in love with me! I can't believe it—he's always been so unpleasant to me."

"Yes, I've suspected that right along, though I didn't like to suggest it. I think he didn't want you

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with us because of the danger to you."

"But to get back to Authority," Ezve went on, "All I promised him was that I would never tell the contents of that paper. And I'll keep my word. Of course the Squadmen turned it over to him as soon as they found it. But I memorized it long ago, before I even figured out what it meant. He is sure I know it, but he thinks I can't injure them.

"So—Dorn, there are still a few of our group left, and they can become the nucleus of a larger one, planet-wide, to create and train an army of—oh, call them missionaries, or advance troops. Authority would call them spies."

"But why? Since our experience, Authority has apparently told his agents to lay off. There hasn't been a serious revolt since. And they *are* a civilizing force, and we *are* benefitting by their superior knowledge. I've come reluctantly to the conclusion that we were rash as well as gullible. If they just want the satisfaction of thinking they rule Earth—"

"They want a lot more than that. Remember, Authority told me they had been left behind to avenge the Pelagerians we killed. Their ultimate objective has been the complete takeover of Earth. They've found their first method didn't work, but don't think they aren't plotting another one. Then the Pelagerians will be truly our rulers forever, and we will be their slaves. I'm almost all Pelagerian myself, Dorn, but I'm just enough a human to want our planet for its own inhabitants."

"Great Space, Ezve, so do we all! But how *can* we fight them? Even if we could train a whole army of combatants, they could bring hordes and hordes more from Pelageria and overwhelm us. Don't forget—they knew how to find us, but we have never been able to discover where they came from."

Ezve's voice was taut.

"If we *could* forestall them—if we had our own army, in our own spaceliners, to invade *them*, I believe, even if it were defeated, that would be enough. I know how their minds work. They are a very logical and reasonable people, and they aren't really warlike.

"They left Authority and the rest behind them for vengeance. But in half a century their sense of outrage has surely cooled. If we could show them that we are no primitives to be subdued and enslaved, but a race potentially equal to their own, to be met on equal terms, I am convinced that they would call back their representatives, give the whole thing up, and wait until mankind had recovered from its setback and progressed again to the point where our two planets could co-operate in peace. And a trained invading force, prepared to debate and persuade unless it is driven to fighting, would

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be the one way to show them. And I believe, thanks largely to their own efforts—you're right about that—we *have* reached that point of recovery by now."

Dorn sighed.

"A beautiful dream, dearest, and I'd be with you entirely, except for one unanswerable thing. As I said, they know only too well how to reach us, but we haven't the slightest knowledge of where they came from."

"Dorn, Dorn, my darling!" Ezve's eyes shone. "Haven't you guessed yet?

"*I* know the formula on that paper, *I* can guide our army.

"It's the formula for the space-co-ordinates to Pelageria!"

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BOOKS

SOMETHING IS RADICALLY wrong when, in a stack of two dozen assorted review books, more than half the novels—and all the best of them—are reprints or reissues, and most of the "new" short story collections—those that are *not* reprints or reissues—are either re-collections or cross-collections from earlier collections, or barrel-bottom scrapings from ten and fifteen years ago.

This month, three books brighten the picture: a satirical novel by a pseudonymous Soviet writer; a new collection of Zenna Henderson's short stories; and one fully justified, warmly welcome cross-collection, culled from Charles Beaumont's three earlier volumes of short stories (YONDER, THE HUNGER, NIGHT RIDE).

Refreshingly enough, the publishers have pulled a switch on the standard disclaimers; the front cover of THE MAGIC MAN* carries the subtitle, "and other science-fantasy stories," although neither the title story, nor most of the rest, are—technically—s-f at all. (The earlier collections were not marketed as s-f, and many readers who would have enjoyed them missed them completely.)

Oddly enough, the jacket is right. Twelve of the eighteen stories are set in the here-and-now, with no significant departure from things-as-they-are, on the surface at least. Yet I do not think Beaumont has ever written anything without the extra element of imaginative speculation that constitutes the essence of s-f. You might say he has been more of a writer about fantasies than a writer of them. He makes use of the typical forms of science fiction or conventional fantasy fiction sometimes, to externalize one of his insights into the seeking soul of modern man—or, again, to project (and thus exaggerate to humorous proportions) some aspect of inner fantasy. But he is usually at his best working in the literary borderland of such stories as "The Magic Man," or "Black Country," "A Classic Affair" or "Miss Gentilbelle."

The themes are the themes of science-fantasy; the style and construction are Beaumont's and uniquely his; the characters are

*THE MAGIC MAN, Charles Beaumont; Gold Medal, 1965; 256 pp. 18 stories plus Foreward by Ray Bradbury and Afterword by Richard Matheson; 50¢.

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sometimes cryingly true to life.

If you don't already know Beaumont, buy it. If you have read him before, but missed any of the earlier books, you're probably on your way out now.

It's a hard act to follow, but Henderson does it. And until I sat down with the two books in front of me, I'd have sworn there couldn't be two more different writers. Stylistically, this is true—most of the time. But here again, the writer's major interest is in the true inner fantasies of real people. "The Anything Box," title story of the collection, is characteristic of the best of Zenna Henderson's work. It is fascinating, when the two books have been separately enjoyed, to look at her "Food to All Flesh" next to Beaumont's "Last Rites," or his "Dark Music" next to her "Walking Aunt Daid." Or "Turn the Page" and "The Magic Man."

There is no need to compare or contrast, however. One need only remember. "Come on Wagon" has lost nothing since it introduced Zenna Henderson to her first readers in the pages of this magazine almost fifteen years ago. Some of the more recent stories here may well prove as memorable: "Something Bright," "Things," "The Grunder," "Subcommittee," "Hush!"

Abram Tertz is the pseudonym of a writer living in the Soviet Union. Three earlier books (FANTASTIC STORIES, ON SOCIALIST REALISM, THE TRIAL BEGINS) have been published here and in England; none of them—including the current volume*—in the U.S.S.R.

THE MAKEPEACE EXPERIMENT is the story of a bicycle mechanic who—almost—becomes the Emperor of the world. It is also a great many other things, but most of all it is a true fable; it caricatures the human condition rather than any particular set of mores or ideological labels. Undoubtedly, the fact that the setting is Russian makes it a funnier and more comfortable book for reading this side of the world. But it is not so much a criticism of sovietism as of bureaucracy and governmental mismanagement anywhere, everywhere.

I think the same happenstance of background that makes the book more agreeable to critics here than the same story might be if set in Iowa for instance, detracts some-

*THE ANYTHING BOX, Zenna Henderson; Doubledayy, 1965; 205 pp., 14 stories; $3.95.

*THE MAKEPEACE EXPERIMENT, Abram Tertz; Translated by Manya Harari, Pantheon (New York) and Haverhill Press (London), 1965; 195 pp., including a Translator's Note $3.95.

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what from the pointedness of the satire for American readers. Just as parody can only be written properly with love and admiration for the source, so political satire is really meaningful only in a framework of sympathy and concern for the political entity involved. The author has this essential sympathy: he smuggles his manuscripts out of his country, and remains there himself to write more. But we who receive the books inevitably miss much of what is being said: we laugh at the right places; we are instructed and informed; we do not, I suspect, cry when we should.

In compensation, perhaps because he uses the bolder strokes of the cartoonist's pen, Tertz's work seems to me to convey a more realistic sense of life-as-it-is in Russia today than most deliberately informational writing.

The same virtue inheres, for quite different reasons, in George Langelaan's French settings. Langelaan's book* carries no translation credits. I assume he writes in English; but he is French-born of English parentage, educated in America, and now again a resident of Paris, one of the rare breed of truly trans-Atlantic citizens.

It is just as confusing to attempt to classify Langelaan's work in terms of familiar literary conventions. He says he is writing horror stories—and most of them are. But: "Horror is a form of fear," he says in a brief preface, "therefore of ignorance. . . . Time is for me one of the best elements of horror, not only because we know so little about it, but because it is nothing and everything. . . . We are beginning to discover that time is something more than real, something tangible and even solid. In it, scientists can already begin to 'feel' the past and the future; in time and space they are discovering time cells, or time in time. For the insect that lives a few minutes, we are eternal, but for a range of mountains, we flit about so rapidly that we do not really exist. . . ."

It is this attitude that transforms most of these stories from simple horror to intriguing speculation. The story best-known here, "The Fly," (of *Playboy* and movie fame) is to my mind one of the least effective; my favorites are "Past the Time Limit" and "The Lady from Nowhere" (as it happens the two most clear-cut "science-fiction" stories in the book), in both of which Langelaan gives free rein to his curiosity about the nature of time, subjective and objective, and its relation to human mortality.

*OUT OF TIME, George Langelaan; Four Square (New English Library paperback), 1965; 190 pp., 10 stories; 3/6 (60¢).

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This seems as good a place as any to pause and explain that I intend (or hope, with the cooperation of British publishers) to include British books in these columns hereafter, whenever there is no American edition planned, or when the two differ significantly. Prices will be given, as in the case of OUT OF TIME, in both currencies. (3/6 means three-and-six, or three shillings, sixpence; the proper currency exchange equivalent for this is 49 or 50 cents; I am, however, to simplify matters, adding in a presumptive postal charge.

Any British, or for that matter, European, publications reviewed here may be obtained from

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Fantast (Medway) Ltd.
75 Norfolk Street
Wisbech, Cambs., England.

Three other British editions not scheduled for American publication are of interest—one particularly so because it is the first book publication of an American author. Rick Raphael's first novel will appear here this year from Simon & Schuster; but a collection of four of his novelets was done in London last spring.* The title story, "The Thirst Quenchers," is one of the best pieces of solid science fiction—the sort of thing you used to read *Astounding* for in the old days—I have seen in a long time and "Guttersnipe" runs a close second.

Also from Gollancz is a first novel by Leonard Daventry*, a book in some ways almost quaintly "scientifictional" in tone—but very new in its examination of the idea of telepathy as a manifestation of the collective unconscious, and in its exploration of the effects of limited supermanhood on the private life of the putative superman.

NOW THEN,* by John Brunner, is a collection of three novelets, only one of which has been published here. "Thou Good and Faithful," appeared in *Astounding* in 1953 under the pseudonym, John Loxmith; it was, in fact, Brunner's first published story, and he has done considerably better since. Happily, one outstanding instance is included in the collection, the opening story, "Some Lapse of Time," which is worth the purchase price by itself.

While we're on the subject of Brunner, I should like at least to mention in passing his Ballantine novel of last year, which missed

*THE THIRST QUENCHERS, **Rick Raphael**; Gollancz (London) 1965; 175 pp., 4 stories; 15/0 ($2.30).

*A MAN OF DOUBLE DEED, **Leonard Daventry**; Gollancz (London), 1965; 176 pp; 15/0 ($2.30).

*NOW THEN, **John Brunner**; Mayflower-Dell paperback (London), 1965; 143 pp., 3 novelets plus author's preface; 3/6 (60¢).

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review here: THE WHOLE MAN. If you haven't read it and can still find it on the newsstands, you will find it a good deal more meaningful and more exciting than the usual run of Brunner's carefully constructed novels.

I wish I could say the same for Poul Anderson's new novel.* All the best bits in here are vivid passages of early English and Danish history. And in the two new volumes of (not so new) novelets published by Chilton*, what is most interesting are the parallels between Captain Sir Dominic Flandry of Terra's Imperial Naval Intelligence Corps, and one James Bond from (Flandry's) remote past. Let me make clear that I *do* mean parallels. As near as I can see, Fleming and Anderson initiated their characters and laid down the unvarying pattern for their performances, at much the same time, in remote literary fields.

What I *am* saying is the flip side of my opening paragraph. Beaumont can write an imaginative speculative story with all the essential ingredients of s-f without ever departing from the forms of so-called "realistic" fiction. Anderson is using the forms of s-f to write thrillers and historicals, and contriving to do so without introducing an element of speculation or fresh invention.

Why?

There are a number of reprints and reissues on hand. Two volumes that do not quite fit in this category are a new Arthur Clarke omnibus and a new translation of the famous *Somnium* of Johannes Kepler.

The Clarke* contains two novels, PRELUDE TO SPACE and THE SANDS OF MARS, originally published in 1952 and 1954 respectively, and sixteen short stories selected from TALES FROM THE "WHITE HART," EXPEDITION TO EARTH, and REACH FOR TOMORROW. Almost everything here will be familiar to regular readers of s-f. If you missed the novels before, you'll probably want the book; otherwise, it's a fine gift volume.

KEPLER'S DREAM, John Lear, with the full text and notes of *Somnium, Sive* Astronomia Lunaris, by Joannis Kepleri, translated by Patricia Frueh Kirkwood; University of California Press, and

*THE CORRIDORS OF TIME, Poul Anderson; Doubleday, 1965; 209 pp; $3.95. *AGENT OF THE TERRAN EMPIRE, Poul Anderson; Chilton, 1965; 198 pp, 4 novelets; $3.95. FLANDRY OF TERRA, Poul Anderson; Chilton, 1965; 225 pp., 3 novelets; $3.95.

PRELUDE TO MARS, Arthur C. Clarke; Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1965; 497 pp; $4.95.

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Cambridge University Press (London), 1965; $5.00. Includes an "Introduction and Interpretation" by John Lear (78 pp.), the full text of Kepler's "Dream" (78 pp.), and his own Introduction and 17-page "Selenographical Appendix."

REPRINTS AND REISSUES:

THE HOBBIT, **J.R.R. Tolkien**; Ballantine, 1965; 287 pp.; 95¢. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING (544 pp.); THE TWO TOWERS (448 pp.), and THE RETURN OF THE KING (544 pp.), comprising the "Fellowship of the Rings" trilogy, **J.R.R. Tolkien**; Ballantine, 1965; 95¢ each.

Those of you who keep up with such things will already be thoroughly familiar with the Great Tolkien Piracy Crisis by the time this column appears. For those who have not already heard all about it, suffice it that the "piracy" in question occurred many years ago, and presumably through negligence rather than intent; but that the Hobbit books were originally published in this country without proper copyright protection. The current controversy concerns rival paperback editions issued this year by Ace Books and Ballantine Books. As of this writing, the author is apparently receiving royalties from Ballantine and not from Ace, and the Ballantine editions carry this statement, over Tolkien's signature: "This paperback edition, and no other, has been published with my consent and cooperation. Those who approve of courtesy (at least) to living authors, will purchase it, and no other."

I believe the Ace editions are cheaper; I hope readers of this column will overlook that attraction.

TRIPLANETARY, **E. E. Smith**; Pyramid, 1965 (Fantasy Press, 1948); 253 pp.; 50¢.

GRAY LENSMAN, **E. E. Smith**; Pyramid, 1965 (Fantasy Press, 1951); 253 pp. 60¢.

A FEAST OF FREEDOM. **Leonard Wibberly**; Bantam, 1965 (Morrow, 1964); 50¢.

RE-BIRTH, **John Wyndham**; Ballantine, 1965, "Bal-Hi" edition, 1965; 185 pp.; 50¢. (One of Wyndham's best—a post-bomb story with a difference.)

THE CASE AGAINST TOMORROW, **Frederik Pohl**; Ballantine, 1957, 1965; 150 pp; 50¢. Contains The Midas Plague, The Census Takers, The Candle-Lighter, The Celebrated No-Hit Inning, Wapshot's Demon, My Lady Green Sleeves.

THE WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION, **Robert P. Mills**, ed.; Paperback Library, 1965; (Dial, 1963); 287 pp.; 75¢. Anthology, including Howard Fast, James Blish, John Collier, Walter M. Miller, Jr., Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein,

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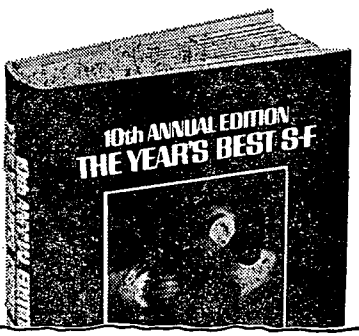
THE ATOMIC AGE, **Morton Grodzins and Eugene Rabinowitch,** eds.; Simon & Schuster Paperback, 1965 (Basic Books, 1963); 616 pp.; $2.75. 65 articles from *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* 1945-1962.

—JUDITH MERRIL



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This story originally appeared in Audience *a quarterly of literature & the arts/75¢/3/6/300 Frs. As far as we know, the magazine is no longer published, and we are grateful to F&SF cover artist Jack Gaughan for discovering the Spring 1959 issue and this fine story by Richard Winkler. AN AFTERNOON IN MAY has its thematic antecedents in SF, but we feel it is deserving of wider exposure because its subject (literary censorship, or freedom from it) is one of increasing interest and importance, and its treatment is nothing short of magnificent.*

AN AFTERNOON IN MAY

by Richard Winkler

"THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY," SAID Mr. McIlwhinney. "I can hear them. Singing something, I believe. They must be fairly well organized."

"In that case, all the worse for us," said Mrs. Foster.

"Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be," said Mr. McIlwhinney, dancing a little jig by the door. He was eighty-three years old, a bit lame in the left leg, a lively small man with very bright eyes and a big humorous mouth. His black suit was wrinkled, as if he had slept in it, and the trousers hung loose and baggy at the knees.

"Now," said Mr McIlwhinney, "let's get organized. Everybody gather 'round!" he called. Mrs. Foster and three other women came to his side. "Where's that young lady?" he said. "Janice!"

Janice, a lush-breasted girl of eighteen, came out from the stacks, pushing a little cart from which she had been re-shelving books.

"I'll stay, Mr. McIlwhinney,"

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she said. Her face was pale, and there was a mist of sweat on her forehead.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. McIlwhinney. "I don't like the look of this, the way it's shaping up, at all. It's every bit as bad as I expected, if not more so. We won't be needing you, Janice."

He opened the door and Janice went out and down the steps into the summer sunshine. "Nice day out there," said Mr. McIlwhinney. The voices were clear now, closer, louder, possibly a block or so away.

"Well, here we are," said Mr. McIlwhinney briskly. "Four ladies, the youngest over sixty, and one old goat who's as good as had it. Please—if anybody is going to leave, leave now. Mrs. Foster?"

"Not I," said Mrs. Foster firmly, pressing her lips together. "Never." She was the youngest there, and she did not like Mr. McIlwhinney making that crack about the youngest being over sixty, since she had just turned sixty the week before.

"Miss Cartwright? There's no need for you to stay."

"Try and get me to go," said Mrs. Cartwright. "I'm seventy-nine, and I have as good as had it too, McIlwhinney. It might as well be now, in a burst of glory."

"It will *not* be glory!" said Mr. McIlwhinney angrily. "Get that idea out of your heads right now, all of you. This is a dirty business. It's going to dirty us too, and there will be no reward."

"Stow it," said Miss Cartwright daringly. Just lately she had been affecting rough language. The past few days, lived in a fever heat of suspense, had at last released her, she felt, from being a lady. "Shove it crossways," she added.

"Why, Miss Cartwright!" said Miss Bertha Tilton. She was one of two sisters, identical twins, seventy years old, who had been associated with the library for so many years that few people of the town thought of them in any other connection. Miss Martha Tilton, at Bertha's side, looked equally shocked.

"Well, how about you, Bertha—and Martha?" said Mr. McIlwhinney, grinning. "Surely there's nothing in the children's section they have any objection to. A nice collection of pretty picture books, to be sure, but nothing worth—"

"*Nothing* there—" said Martha Tilton. "Spoken like an eighty-three-year-old man, indeed, Mr. McIlwhinney. But hardly like the chairman of the board of library trustees. Must I relinquish the defiance of William Tell without a fight? And the skepticism of *The Emperor's New Clothes?* What about Kipling? And Grimm? And —"

"Okay, okay," said Mr. McIlwhinney. "No speeches, please. It's for you to decide. Now," he went on, "I have this planned, but you should know that we are not capable of much resistance. The

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situation is very serious, it will grow more serious by the minute, and I am not sure we can expect aid from the police."

Miss Cartwright snorted. "You're blamed right we can't!" she said. "Not with Chief Diverssy's son heading the Society for Stability, and the Chief probably clearing the way for this march."

"For that matter," Mrs. Foster said, "we can't expect any help from the board of trustees, either. Except you, Mr. McIlwhinney."

"Indeed," murmured Mr. McIlwhinney. His face grew red. "I am afraid that is true, Mrs. Foster, and I feel I must have been deficient in pointing out to them the gravity—"

"They're deficient in guts, let's face it," said Miss Cartwright, smoothing out the front of her skirt.

"Now," said Mr. McIlwhinney. "We have only to watch, I believe, the front door and the windows. The back door is already barricaded and piled high with stacks of books. The windows are really too high for entry, I think, so we have only to look for bricks and stones through them. The front door must be barricaded immediately after I talk to them. I am sure I shall fail to disperse them."

"Look at that crowd!" said Mrs. Foster in horror. "My God! Why, it must be half the town come to see the show."

"A conservative estimate," said Mr. McIlwhinney. "And I believe you'll find, Mrs. Foster, that they have not come to see the show. They have come to join in. I see my grandson Olly, and I believe that is your sister-in-law there across the street by the mailbox."

"Shameful!" said Martha Tilton. "Shame on all of them!"

"Noble sentiments," said Mr. McIlwhinney dryly, "but somehow inadequate to the situation." He opened the front door and stepped outside.

Instantly the wave of yelling engulfed him as he stood there, a bent old man trying to hold himself erect on the white scrubbed library steps, looking at the crowds in the middle of the street. He was bald, his head shining in the afternoon sunlight. He raised his hand for silence but of course got none.

"Go home!" he shouted. "Cease and desist! Disperse! Shame on all of you for acting like this!" (*Inadequate,* he chuckled to himself, *just as I told Martha it was, trying to shame members of the Society or their followers.*)

"Isn't he a magnificent old bastard?" said Mrs. Foster, thrilling to the words on her tongue.

"Sure is," said Martha Tilton. "But he'd better come back in now. He's the only man we have, and we need him if we're going to stick it out."

Shouts of "Hang McIlwhinney! Kill him!" came from the crowd. A young man standing next to

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Diverssy, bearing a banner which said, "Down with Goethe, Kant, and Plato," suddenly whipped a pistol and fired at Mr. McIlwhinney from a distance of fifty feet.

Mr. McIlwhinney staggered back against the doorframe. Surprisingly, an Army .45 automatic appeared in his trembling hands. He aimed it with both hands and fired it six times, in rapid succession, above the heads of the crowd, but not much above. There was a frenzied scrambling to the opposite curb for safety, and Mr. McIlwhinney scurried back through the door.

"Are you hurt?" said Mrs. Foster, rushing to his side.

Mr. McIlwhinney grinned. "The May issue of *House Beautiful,*" he said, drawing it out from under his shirt, "a good thick issue, loaded with advertising, offers fair protection against small arms fire."

"I was telling the girls," said Mrs. Foster, "that you are a magnificent old bastard."

Mr. McIlwhinney chuckled. "The Battling Bastard of the Bibliotheque," he said, "that's me." He ran behind the main desk, reached into the big bottom drawer of the storage cabinet and straightened up. He laid three .30 caliber Army carbines on the glass top.

"Stolen from the armory last week," he smiled, "and no mean feat for a man four-score."

The women stared.

"I mean to make a fight of it," said Mr. McIlwhinney, smiling no longer. "This is a big thing, girls, a horrible thing, and crying 'shame' will not help. For the last time, you may leave by the front door. There is still time, if you walk out slowly with your hands above your heads."

The women did not move.

"Well, then," he said, "these are carbines. They are each loaded with a clip of, I think, fifteen bullets. There are more bullets which I'll issue should the need arise. Here is the safety catch. Do not push it off until you are ready to fire. Point the gun only out the door or window or at the ceiling. Be very careful, or you will kill one of us."

"Gimme one of those!" said Miss Cartwright. "And somebody bring me the stepladder. I'll take a window."

"Not yet!" warned Mr. McIlwhinney. "First we must all move fast to barricade the door high. We'll have to slide the steel stacks over and the re-stack the books on the shelves. I want three or four stacks against the door, and we'll fire through them, if necessary. They'll be coming soon, in a rush."

"Not those cowards!" said Miss Cartwright. "They'll skulk over there and throw rocks."

"You're wrong," Mr. McIlwhinney said. "They mean business,

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and they're going to carry it through."

The big window above the door shattered. A large bent rusty bolt came sailing in and caromed off the main desk. The glass desk top cracked in two directions.

"I find it difficult to convince myself," said Mr. McIlwhinney, "that I'm doing this for Kant, whom I find obscure, or Goethe. Of course Goethe's all right, but sometimes irritatingly glib. And Plato cold, cold! Do you think we're silly after all, Mrs. Foster?"

"I wouldn't even let the scum have P. G. Wodehouse," said Mrs. Foster, pressing her lips together. "We should let them come through here and take out half the books, anything they call unstable, anything on their list they say we can't keep and can't give out. I say to hell with them."

"I believe," said Mr. McIlwhinney, bending under an armload of books as he walked, "that this will be something of a test case. If the Society finds the police cooperative here, and the people, then other cities should follow. Perhaps next, let's say, Wichita, Kansas and Springfield, Illinois. Then on to Boston, Cleveland, St. Louis, Chicago—"

The door was now well-barricaded, and Miss Cartwright leaped to her stepladder and mounted it. She peered out the window. There was a flurry of shots and a splatter of bullets on brick. She came hurriedly down the ladder.

"I have had it," she said. "But I am still going to get at least one of them."

Sure enough, there was blood on her blouse in front and back, and the warm smell of blood in the air.

"Lie down, please, Miss Cartwright," said Martha Tilton, "you're hurt."

"Damn right I'm hurt!" said Miss Cartwright. She seized a carbine from the desk and at the same moment Mr. McIlwhinney fired four times through the door. "Aha!" he said. "Tumbled him. They're falling back again. Think they're a bit surprised at our firepower. Firepower," he repeated. "I love that word."

Painfully Miss Cartwright climbed back up the stepladder. She rested her gun on the sill and, with her head just barely above the opening, studied the crowd in the street. The two Tilton sisters and Mrs. Foster watched her in fascination. It seemed unreal, but blood was dripping from Miss Cartwright's blouse onto her skirt and there was even some on her shoes. Miss Cartwright fired.

"If I didn't wing that damn Diverssy, I'll be surprised," she said, and dropped the gun. Then she half slid down the stepladder and lay on the floor.

Martha Tilton opened Miss Cartwright's blouse. There was a hole in the center of her chest and

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the blood welled up bright red and swam in thinning streams down her gaunt ribs. Stones were coming through the windows in clouds, falling to the floor. Mr. McIlwhinney, who had been firing steadily, slipped a fresh clip into his carbine.

"Take care of her, girls!" he snapped. "And one of you take a gun and watch the windows. *Don't* climb the stepladder. You're a sitting duck when you do. Just cover the windows from the floor here, and if you see a head show up, let him have it."

"Heavens!" said Miss Cartwright. "I think I'm checking out. And I can't think of anything to say. There should be something I could say, on a day like this—"

"Don't worry, dear, you'll think of something," said Martha, patting the bloody blouse and feeling her hand get sticky, "something that will go down in history."

"That's a good one!" said Miss Miss Cartwright, raising her head. "Something that will go down in *recorded* history!" She tried to laugh. "I'm afraid," she whispered to Martha, "that I'm going to wet my pants. Everything hurts so much."

"Never mind," said Martha. "Nobody will notice, dear."

"I smell smoke," said Mrs. Foster, who was prowling back and forth with a carbine in her hands, covering the windows.

"My God," said Mr. McIlwhinney. "I didn't think they'd do that, girls. I thought they'd try tear gas before that. We're so close to the other buildings in town."

"It must be the roof," said Bertha Tilton. She had climbed the stepladder and was looking out the window. "Why," she said, "the police are there."

"Thank God," said Mrs. Foster.

"But they're not doing anything," said Bertha, "except standing around the trees in the shade."

Mr. McIlwhinney came away from the door for a moment.

"Miss Cartwright is dead," said Martha, tears starting in her eyes.

"God bless her," said Mr. McIlwhinney, "she had real guts. Makes me sorry I used to haggle with her every year, over the amount of the non-fiction allocation."

"Well, girls," he said, "it's up to you. There's a little time left. We can give up and let them have anything they want. Or *you* can leave—if you can get out alive—and I'll stick it out."

"I'm staying," said Mrs. Foster. "And it's getting mighty warm in here."

"It's burning worse over the children's wing," said Martha. "But Bertha and I wouldn't think of deserting our beloved *picture* books, Mr. McIlwhinney."

"Sorry I called them that," said Mr. McIlwhinney. "I did not mean to hurt your feelings. There is one more chance left, just pos-

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sibly. See if you can raise the fire department, Mrs. Foster, on the phone. Perhaps they will come, since adjacent buildings are sure to go if the library does."

Mrs. Foster went to the phone behind the desk and dialed the number. "The Library's on fire!" she shouted. "The Library! They're trying to burn the Library down! Come at once!"

"What did they say?" asked Mr. McIlwhinney, taking up his position at the door again, and firing idly at nothing in particular. The smoke was thick above them, billowing down.

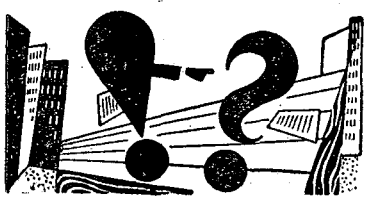
"Well, they answered the phone, at least," said Mrs. Foster. "They got the message."

"Perhaps they will come," said Bertha Tilton. She raised herself on the stepladder and looked boldly out of the window. "Can't see them yet," she said, and fell over backward, a long fall to the floor. Martha screamed, rushed over and fell across her twin, sobbing.

Over in the children's wing, the plaster above crumpled suddenly, there was a spurt of smoke and flame, and two ceiling joists, burned through, thundered down on the small tables with a scattering of sparks and burning brands. The smoke grew intermittently into thick puffs which burst as they were sucked up through the hole in the roof. There was a smell of burning varnish from the tables. The asphalt floor tile began to bubble.

Mr. McIlwhinney coughed and smiled. "When we considered the plans for this building," he said, "I implored the trustees to go along with me on a tile roof for the library. 'Remember, gentlemen,' I said, 'we are building for the future.' "

"I don't hear any fire engines," said Mrs. Foster.



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Walt Gayle had lost his office in the explosion and a perfectly good chair after the 3-second burst of the Braden Gun. Except for the stranger Jeremiah, he would have lost his life as well. Who was Jeremiah—and more important, who was trying to kill him, and why? After four years absence from these pages, Randall Garrett returns to tell a swift-paced story of science and intrigue.

WITNESS FOR THE PERSECUTION

by Randall Garrett

IT WAS THE LOONAIRTHIAN WHO saved my life.

Of course, I did not know at the time that he was a Loonairthian. How could I possibly have known? Who would ever have thought such a thing?

At first I thought he meant to kidnap me.

The door to my office flew open suddenly, and, without any previous warning, the man with the eagle nose, the blue eyes, and the curly blond hair was charging across the room toward me. He trailed a party of three, which consisted of my secretary and two stenographers.

"You can't go in there!" my secretary wailed. "Oh, Mr. Gayle, I *tried* to stop him! I *tried* . . ."

I didn't hear the rest of what she said. The stranger came to a halt at the edge of my desk. And yet, somehow, it didn't seem like a complete halt; it was as though the motion were temporarily suspended, but ready to begin again in an instant.

"There is no time to waste," he said, in a voice that was urgent without being harsh. "Come along with me."

"Now, see here," I said, "what the devil do you mean—"

"No time, I said, no time," the man said. And the motion was no longer suspended. He came round my desk and grabbed me.

I have no idea to this day how he did what he did. I don't recall exactly how he grabbed me nor

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where. He didn't hurt me or twist my arm or anything like that. I just had the feeling of irrisistible force being applied through his fingertips, a force that propelled me along as though I were in a hurry to get out of the office through my own volition.

"Come along!" he said. "Out of here! Fast!"

He was not an especially big man; indeed, he was a couple of inches shorter than I. But he frog-marched me across the room and out of the door with no apparent effort.

The three women tried to stop him, but he somehow managed to avoid or escape their hands without once letting up on the force he was applying to me. I had the impression that their being women had nothing to do with it, that three—or three dozen—husky men would have suffered the same casual rebuff.

I finally found my breath again. "Mirom!" I yelled at my secretary. "Get help! Call the rest of the staff!"

"Yes!" said the stranger in his gentle, commanding voice. "By all means! Get the rest of the staff! Follow us! And *hurry*!"

Not all the staff made it.

I didn't hear the blast. A person really can't hear a blast when he's that close to it. The pressure wave lifted both of us off our feet. My ears felt as if someone had turned them off. I was in the air, and then I was falling forward and the floor seemed to lift toward me. It was like being kicked in the belly and the face at the same time.

Several seconds went away without my noticing them.

The next thing I remember is being helped to my feet by the blond stranger. "You'll be all right, Mr. Gayle," he said soothingly. "Got a handkerchief? Your nose is bleeding."

I held my handkerchief to my nose and looked at the man. It took my brain half a minute or so to realize that the explosion had come from my office, and that if I had still been in there I would very likely be quite dead at that moment.

"Who—who are you?" I heard myself stammer a little.

He smiled. A friendly, persuasive smile. "You may call me Jeremiah. Because of the profit motive. Come along. Let's go back and see what happened. It's perfectly safe now."

He turned and walked back toward my office. I followed, not knowing what else to do. I was still dazed, not so much by the shock of the explosion as by the rapidity with which things seemed to be happening.

The outer office was a mess. The chair behind the desk was overturned, the desk itself was skewed sideways, both paintings had fallen off the walls, the floor lamp had toppled, and there were papers all

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over the place. Maddon Zack, my assistant, was lying on the floor, his head covered with blood. He had evidently come in from the side office in response to the call for help. Mirom Flood, my secretary, was staring at him rather dazedly. The two stenographers were still having quiet hysterics in the hall.

The man who called himself Jeremiah knelt beside Zack and looked at him. Then he looked up at me. "Maddon Zack?"

I nodded. "My assistant."

"He's not badly hurt, but he should be hospitalized." He stood up and looked at Mirom. "Miss Flood, call a physician. Are you a good liar?"

Mirom blinked. "A physician. Yes. *What*?"

"Are you a good liar?" he repeated gently.

"If . . . yes, if necessary."

"Good. Then you will tell the physician that Mr. Walt Gayle has been injured in an explosion. That will give us time. Go out and calm those two young ladies down. Get them out of sight."

For some reason, all the shock and uncertainty left Mirom Flood's face. "Yes, sir. What about the police?"

"No need. Listen."

In the silence that followed, we could hear the hum of approaching aircars.

"Go, Miss Flood. You don't know where Mr. Zack is. If they ask you later how you made such a mistake, it is because the blood made the patient hard to recognize. Besides, you were confused by the blast. Right?"

"Right." She turned and was gone.

Jeremiah walked over to the wrecked door that led to the inner office. He pushed it aside and looked in.

"Take a look, Mr. Gayle."

I looked.

All the inner office needed to make it a shambles was blood. And, but for Jeremiah, there would have been blood there. My blood.

There was a hole in the outside wall. It was about half a meter in diameter, and the edges were only slightly ragged. The cast plastite had been neatly punched out and shattered into shrapnel. My desk looked as though it had been hit by a giant-sized shotgun.

"Limpet mine," Jeremiah said. "Polarized detonate. The stuff gives a coherent blast in two directions, like firing a gun with no breech, if you follow me. Nasty."

I said, "Who's trying to kill me?"

"I'll explain later. Not much time now. Let's get out of here before the cops come in force."

It wasn't until then that I realized why it was that we could hear aircars coming. The sound was coming in through the hole in the wall.

I followed Jeremiah out of the office and into the elevator.

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I stood at the window of my small bachelor's apartment and looked at the suns, seeing them without noticing them. The primary, One, was simply being its normal yellow self, while the distant Two was a bright, hard, diamond pinpoint of blue-white. During the years when Two is in the night sky, there is no real night, because Two illuminates the planet beautifully. But now, when Two was passing around the other side of One, the nights were black. The Galactic Lens is clear from here, but we have no moon.

Behind me, the man who called himself Jeremiah said: "Does it really surprise you to find that someone is trying to kill you?"

I turned away from the window and looked at him. "Of course it does! Why should anyone want to kill me? I've done no harm."

"You will, Oscar, you will."

"My name's not Oscar; it's Walt. Walt Gayle."

"Sorry. Obscure joke. Forget it. What I meant to convey was that, although you have done no harm as yet, the people who are out to get you are afraid that you may do them harm in the future. They want to prevent harm, not avenge it."

His voice sounded so calm that I wondered why I was taking his words so seriously. I sat down in the chair facing him, and I had the feeling that my knees weren't any too steady.

"Someone really wants to kill me?" I said.

"Let us say that there are those who think your death would be the simplest solution to their problem," Jeremiah said.

I think at this point I made some dramatic gesture, such as throwing my arms wide and closing my eyes, or perhaps I clenched my fists and held them against my temples. I distinctly remember talking through clenched teeth. "In the name of the Twin Planets, will you please tell me what in the Galaxy you are *talking* about?"

"Paragravity," he said, briefly and succinctly. His mild blue eyes looked at me over his great beak of a nose.

I must have been holding my breath; the air went out of my lungs with a *huhhh*, as though a finger had jabbed me in the solar plexus.

"But . . ." The word sounded feeble, so I took a breath and tried again. "But nobody knows yet. . . ." My voice trailed off.

"*I* know," Jeremiah pointed out reasonably enough. "And so does somebody else, obviously."

"But the Interstellar Trader said . . ."

". . . That you had a monopoly," he finished for me. "And that it would be secret. Certainly."

"You're not implying that the Interstellar Traders are corrupt, are you?" Even the thought of such a thing was vaguely repellant to

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me. If the Interstellar Traders, with a thousand years of unblemished tradition behind them, could be corrupt, then one's faith in any sort of human organization was shaken.

Jeremiah lifted one eyebrow, lowered the other, and cocked his head to one side. "I implied nothing of the sort, and you inferred entirely too much. Don't be fatuous, my dear Gayle; the possibility of corruption in the Interstellar Traders is not a factor to be entered in this equation—even if it did in fact exist. The factor that must, of necessity, be considered is the existence of a group of powerful, intelligent men who have observed the development of a pattern. They don't want to see that pattern develop here on Barnesworld—or, rather, in the planetary system of Barnesstar."

He was going to say more, but at that moment the door announcer sounded. I glanced quickly at the peepscreen. It was Mirom Flood. I punched the opener, and she came in quickly, closing the door behind her.

"Excuse me, Mr. Gayle, Mr.—uh—"

"Jeremiah," said Jeremiah. "What happened?"

"Nothing, really. The police came. I said I was in the hall when the explosion occurred—which was true. They didn't ask me much. Didn't ask the girls anything. We were all too upset—not to say hysterical. They told us all to go home after the ambulance came and flew Mr. Zack to the hospital."

"You told them he was Mr. Gayle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. He'll be safe as long as they think they have him in a safe place. I think—"

"But, sir!" Mirom broke in, "They know it isn't Mr. Gayle! One of the police officers recognized Mr. Zack, and he—"

Jeremiah leaped to his feet. "Let's get out of here! They'll have followed you, of course! Or, worse, they'll already have men from—*Get away from that window, Gayle!*"

At the whipcrack sound of his voice, I jumped as though he had actually lashed at me with a whip.

Nothing happened.

Honestly, I almost felt disappointed. I had had the feeling that when Jeremiah gave an order like that, instant death was so near that delay in action would make it inevitable.

"Pick up that big chair and put it with its back to the other window," he said.

I obeyed.

"Now sit down in it. Hurry!"

I sat.

"Now, fall forward, and come over here to the door on your hands and knees. Move!"

I moved, feeling rather foolish.

"All right. You can stand up now. Let's get out of here."

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Mirom Flood started to open the door, but Jeremiah pushed her gently aside. *"Apres moi, La Deluge,"* he said, going out the door first, looking cautiously but not furtively around.

We turned left and headed toward the drop chutes. We were maybe fifty feet from the door of my apartment when we heard the roar. And this time it was a roar, not a sudden shock wave. I turned to look. The roar was still going on.

Big holes were suddenly appearing in the wall near the door of my place, splattering plastite all over the place, filling the corridor with dust and smoke.

"Come *on*!" Jeremiah said.

We went down fast.

"What in hell was that?" I asked.

"A Braden gun," he said with a smile. "Fifty rounds per second of twelve millimeter, high velocity, explosive slugs. I'm afraid you've lost a perfectly good chair in that three-second burst."

"They thought I was in it." My voice sounded odd to me.

"Certainly. The trouble with a Braden gun is that it has to be fairly heavily braced. That means that it takes time to change its point of aim. They had it aimed at the window you'd been standing at. When they saw you move the chair over to the other window and sit down, they re-aimed the gun. But by the time they fired, you were no longer in the chair—a fact which they neglected to determine. So far, we are ahead of them by several seconds; let's hope we can keep it that way, eh?"

Mirom Flood expressed my sentiments when she said: "Cuh-couldn't we stretch it to thuh-three hours? Or buh-better yet, three centuries?"

As we stepped out of the drop chute, Jeremiah put his hand very gently on her arm. His smile radiated confidence and compassion. "Stretch it we shall, Miss Flood; stretch it we shall. So far that it will snap back in their faces when we let go."

She smiled back. His very presence was bracing, somehow.

We were in the basement of the building. As we walked rapidly down a corridor, I could hear faint humming, throbbing noises from behind the locked doors on either side of us—the computers and power generators and other mechanisms which took care of the comfort of the residents of the apartments. It suddenly occurred to me to wonder how we'd managed to get this far. Normally, no resident can take a drop chute any lower than the first floor. Only qualified maintenance men are supposed to be able to get into the basement at all.

I asked Jeremiah, but all he said was: "One has methods, my dear Gayle. One has methods. Or else one dies. Come along."

I went along.

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The maintenance tunnels connected one building with another, naturally, since it would be inconvenient for maintenance squads to have to go from building to building by going up to ground level and back down again all the time. But there were heavy doors between buildings which were locked and kept locked unless a proper maintenance man used his power key. When Jeremiah unlocked the first door, producing a power key from his pocket, I started to ask him about it, but he anticipated me.

"I stole it," he said with a grin. "Now don't talk any more, and follow me."

We must have gone through several hundred yards of corridors and tunnels, and Jeremiah must have unlocked five or six of those barrier doors before he led us to a lift chute and we went up to the roof of a building that was unfamiliar to me.

He went over to the signal lock and put another key in, just as though he were a resident of the building. Automatically, the computer controls checked his key, found the aircar in the garage, put it on the lift, and, within two minutes, an aircar was delivered to the roof takeoff area.

I spent the two minutes trying to gather my wits. So, apparently, did Mirom, and she succeeded rather better than I did, for as the aircar lifted into the sky, she said: "Are you an Interstellar Trader, Mr. Jeremiah?"

"Me?" He laughed a little. "Heavens no! Whatever made you think that?"

"I was thinking about—uh—some legends, I guess. I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about. What legends?"

"Oh, *you* know the sort of thing. I mean, the Twin Planets are actually supposed to exist, you know, somewhere in the Galaxy—I mean, a lot of people *say* they do. And—well, maybe they're just children's stories, but they say—"

"They?" Jeremiah interrupted mildly.

"People. You know. According to the stories, the people of the Double World are kind and sweet and helpful and, well, they have magic powers and so on."

"And what has this to do with the Interstellar Traders or with my being one?"

"Well, the legends say that the Interstellar Traders really come from the Twin Planets."

"And?"

She turned her head to look straight at him. "Mr. Jeremiah, how did you know about somebody trying to shoot Mr. Gayle from across the street with a Braden gun?"

As I said, Mirom had pulled herself together mentally much more quickly than I had. That was the question that I had been going to ask. And for that matter how

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had he known about the limpet bomb that had blasted my office? I didn't suspect him of being some sort of fairy magician from the legendary Twin Planets, of course, but I *was* beginning to think he knew more about what my enemies were doing than he ought to unless he was actually in cahoots with them for some obscure reason.

Jeremiah laughed. "My friends, I give you my word that I am not an Interstellar Trader. In fact, if any of the Traders come from the Double World, it is certainly news to me. Did the Trader you dealt with seem to be an angelic do-gooder, Gayle?"

"No," I admitted. "He seemed like a hard-headed businessman. But how *did* you know about the Braden gun and the limpet bomb?"

"I can't tell you about the bomb," he said seriously. "I found it out from your enemies through a source I cannot reveal. But the Braden gun was simplicity itself. I didn't know it was a Braden gun until after they fired, but I knew it had to be something of that sort. Consider: They were after you, trying to kill you. As long as they believed the bomb had done so, you were safe. Even if they thought you were only hurt, they could bide their time. But as soon as they knew you'd escaped, agents were sent to cover your apartment. When they found us there, they had to set up something that would kill you through a solid transite window. A rocket might work, but a Braden gun was by far the more efficient.

"As soon as Miss Flood warned us, I looked out the window and saw that someone had actually removed the transite pane from a window across the street. So I said what I said and we did what we did. Nothing magic in that, I think."

"No. But . . . a *Braden gun!* They're forbidden for private citizens, and I didn't think it would be that easy to steal one from a Government armory."

"It isn't easy, but it can be done," he told me. "A person in the right position can juggle a few papers and get one out by apparently legal means."

"Who are these people? Do you know? Can you tell me?"

"I can't name names just yet, but I can give you a general idea of who they are and why they want to dispose of you."

"I'd be grateful," I said, with just the merest touch of irony.

"Very well. The explanation may be a bit roundabout, but I'll have to ask you to bear with me. We have plenty of time, and I want you to see the whole picture."

"Plenty of time?" I said. "Where are we going?"

"To your place up near Vysington. We have to get away from the city for a while."

"How did you know . . .?"

"Please. Let me . . ."

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"But *nobody* knows," I interrupted rather violently. "I bought it through my . . . through an agent. How did you find out I had a country home near Vysington?"

He let out a tired sigh. "When I first went into your office to warn you of the impending explosion, you had just written a note to Miss Flood that you could be located at 377-466-2929. That's a number in the Vysington area but not in the village itself. Mostly country homes; very little farming. Either yours or a friend's, then. I assumed it was yours on the strength of your rather sparsely furnished apartment. That was obviously not where you did your real living, if I may use the phrase. Not with your personality and the kind of money you make. By the way, I took the liberty of removing that note before the police got there.

"Now may I give you the explanation which you asked me for before?"

"Yes. I'm sorry. Go ahead." I actually felt apologetic.

We were cruising along at the thousand-meter level, northbound, just over the Pelligrain River. To the west, One had already dropped beneath the horizon, leaving a red glow punctuated by the bright white pinpoint of Two, which would not set for another half hour yet. Jeremiah's face, silhouetted against the faintly crimson sky, seemed to take on a hardness that I had never seen there before.

"First, you will have to see the pattern—the pattern that seems so deadly dangerous to those who want to destroy you. It concerns a series of planets—their names don't matter, so we can just call them A, B, C, and so on. Like your own system, they each consist of one habitable planet, a few uninhabitable ones, and a belt of planetoids. Otherwise, nothing unusual.

"As usual, the original settlers had neglected the planets that were inimical to Man. With a whole beautiful world to take for the taking, why go elsewhere? Look at the planets around Barnesstar. Besides Barnesworld, what do you have? Two useless ammonia giants, two smaller worlds, and the planetoid belt. One of the smaller worlds, Inkblot, is too close to Two, and the other, Spindizzy, is cold and has no atmosphere. Who wants to live there?

"The planets that preceded Barnesworld in the pattern were in the same general situation. Until Interstellar Trading vessels brought the invention of paragravity."

I frowned, but I didn't say anything. I wanted to learn.

But instead of going on, he threw me two questions: "Gayle, why doesn't Barnesworld have any interstellar ships? Why does it have only a few vessels?"

"Expense," I said flatly. "Who needs them?" Answers to both questions, I thought.

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"Elucidate and clarify," he said with a quick grin.

"Do you know how much it costs to build an interstellar vessel?" I countered. "Billions. How could we afford it? And what good would it be to us after we'd built it? If I want to go to another star—which I don't—I can always book passage on the next Interstellar Trader that comes through. It's expensive, even at that. And where would I go and why?

"The Interstellar Traders make a go of it because they can make high profits, bringing devices and inventions from one world to another. They trade in ideas, which are easy to transport because their mass is nil, and in Planetary Uniques, things which can be produced or grown on only one planet. But what good would an interstellar ship be to Barnesworld even if we could afford to build one?"

"Colonization?" Jeremiah asked thoughtfully. "Emigration? Are there no malcontents, no adventurers? That's how Barnesworld was first seeded with humanity."

"That was nearly four hundred years ago," I said. "We haven't filled this planet yet, and we won't. Birth rate equals death rate. Plenty of land for everyone."

"Under one government," Jeremiah said softly.

"Right. No wars, as I've heard there are on some planets in the Galaxy," I said.

"Seems to me you're caught in the middle of a war right now," said Jeremiah. "But we'll skip that. Why no interplanetary vessels? They aren't so terribly expensive."

"No, but what's the need of them? There are a few scientists who want to know a little more about the history of the Barnesstar System, but there's nothing out there we need. With a whole planet to exploit and only a quarter of a billion people to exploit it, there's no need of spending extra money to go into space."

Soft music suddenly filled the inside of the aircar. Mirom had reached out and turned on the communicator's entertainment band. She was listening, obviously, to what Jeremiah and I were talking about, but she's the kind of girl who likes soft music in the background to soothe her nerves.

"Tell me," Jeremiah said, "why did you buy the paragravity secret from Trader Karlon?"

That tore it! He knew! Or, at least, he seemed to know. I worded my answer very carefully. "I understand it can be used as a space drive."

"So it can. Cheaper by far than the one that's now used here on Barnesworld. But who needs it?" He threw my own words right back at me.

"I wanted . . ." I began.

"*Shhh*! Listen!" Mirom interrupted. Her hand darted out and turned up the volume control on

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the communicator. I had been vaguely aware that a news program had come on, but I was not prepared for what I heard.

". . . Walt Gayle, prominent financier and managerial executive, is the object of a police search this evening. His office at 1447 Bergenholm Drive was destroyed late this afternoon by a mysterious blast. Shortly thereafter, his home in the Crestwood Towers was similarly destroyed. Gayle, thirty-one, has been missing since just before the time of the first explosion, in which one man was seriously injured. Also missing is his private secretary, Miss Mirom Flood, twenty-six, who is believed to be with Gayle. No charges have as yet been filed against Gayle or the Flood woman, but police officials feel that Gayle can give information pertinent to the case. The reason for and the cause of the explosions have yet to be determined.

"On the North Coast today, a slight tremor caused by the eruption of Mount Cherongal was—"

I cut off the communicator, feeling rather savage. I glared at Jeremiah. I don't remember how my voice sounded, but it must have been pretty vicious.

"You!" I swallowed and tried again. "I've never run away from trouble in my life, damn you, but I ran this time because you pushed me into it. Now they're looking for me as though *I* did it! If I'd stayed and explained, they—"

"—They would have shot you dead." Jeremiah's voice was so calm and yet so forceful that I closed my mouth and stared at him.

"You heard what the report said," he went on. "But did you hear what it *didn't* say?"

Mirom touched my arm. "Walt. Walt. Listen to him." The formal attitude which we had agreed to exhibit before others had deserted her completely. "How could the police not know what caused the damage? How could they *not* know?"

I got it then. For the first time, real fear choked my throat. "The police are in on it," I said hoarsely.

"To some degree," Jeremiah agreed. "Not, I think, in on the attempted killings themselves, but they have at least been told to keep their opinions to themselves."

"Somebody high up . . ."

"More than one somebody," Jeremiah corrected. "Now, do you want to listen to the rest of my historical recitation?"

Both Mirom and I nodded without speaking.

Jeremiah eased off to the east. The river below us seemed to move to the left, making a bright, silvery ribbon in the light of Two as it dropped toward the horizon.

"Let's get back to the pattern, then," Jeremiah said. "Take System A. Similar to Barensstar's System, as I said. A single government on the one inhabitable planet. The Interstellar Traders sold one man

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there the paragravity principle. He put it on the market and sold cheap flyers that handled better and cost no more than this aircar. But they were capable of interplanetary flight. Add a little instrumentation and a small computer, and any reasonably intelligent person could learn to take one to anywhere in that planetary system."

He turned his head to give me a single penetrating glance. "Where did you intend to set up your quiet little retreat, Gayle? And how did you plan to go about it?"

I let out my breath. Defeat. "I found a planetoid," I said in a voice that sounded dead in my ears. "Half a kilometer in diameter. Almost spherical. Plenty of room on the surface. Would've made a beautiful place."

"How?"

"Spherical paragravity field. The thing can do more than drive a ship. Put a generator in the center of the planetoid and set the field for one gravity. The attraction only falls off linearly—according to the first power of the distance. But it begins to phase out, since it's actually two alternating fields. At a certain distance—depending on the power applied—the two fields are ninety degrees out of phase, and the paragravity field vanishes. With paragravity, every body in the universe does *not* attract every other body. Beyond the spherical 'surface' where the field phases out, there is no attraction at all. Inside that 'surface', if the body is small enough, the attraction can be set to give a one-gee field which will hold an atmosphere. You can make a perfectly habitable planet out of a little planetoid. All you have to do is bring in soil, air, water, plants, and animals—all picked to give a balanced ecology—and you have a little world all your own."

"It would've made a beautiful place."

Jeremiah nodded. "And you never run from anything, eh?"

"No. Yes. What happened to System A?" I felt terribly tired.

"Just what you think. People went out to the planetoids. Big ones, little ones—each to his own taste. The planetary government lost control over them. They had a police fleet, of course, but the police were reduced to the role of stopping really vile crimes—murder, rape, and so on. Otherwise, a planetoid dweller was allowed to live as he pleased, without regimentation, without having to conform to a governmental norm, without having to please his neighbors so long as he didn't harm them.

"Oh, there was no perfection there; don't think that. They had all kinds of troubles—piracy, robbery, claim-jumping, drug-running, gambling troubles, and . . .

"Well, you name it, they prob-

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ably had it. But it quieted down. After all, they were dependent on each other. I don't care how cozy a little terrarium you make of a little planetoid, you'll need imports. You can't build the factories you need on a hunk of rock a few hundred meters in diameter. A man on a farm can live in isolation, all right, but only at the expense of doing without the technological developments that he has become accustomed to. What does he do for medical care? What does he do for repairs and replacements? It becomes a case of 'cooperate—or else.'

"There were some planetoids where the inhabitants cut themselves off completely, with only a few men and a few women. The results after a generation were—well, not unspeakable, but certainly not worth dwelling upon. But those cases were rare, and, in any case not viable.

"Eventually the system leveled itself out. Because of the distance separating the thousands of colonies, the people had freedom, but that was modified by the necessity of co-operation."

Mirom cleared her throat. "Were they—were they happy?"

Jeremiah chuckled softly. "Some of them. Not all, by any means. *But if they weren't happy, they could always go somewhere else and try again.*

"Happy? I should say they were more likely to be happy than the people of Barnesworld. Democracy is a great thing, Miss Flood; the human race can't get along without it. But in a society where the majority rules, *what out does the minority have?*

"There are times, Miss Flood, when the only recourse a minority group has is to perform that maneuver known in military science as the Tactic of Getting the Hell Out.

"Why do you think humanity has spread throughout the Galaxy? Adventure? Exploration? Not predominantly. Usually people go somewhere else because they don't like the way things are going where they are. Oh, sure, there can be a revolution, but that simply means that some other group becomes the minority. Which means that the group in power must watch for another revolution.

"There's a way to mask that, naturally. A revolution is dangerous. People get killed. So you take the majority and split it into two parts. It's a process that works well in a regimented, but moribund and self-satisfied society. You call the two parts of the majority group Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Then you set it up so that Tweedledum is in power. When the minority becomes fed up to the ears with Tweedledum, you have a revolution—either with guns or with ballots—and then Tweedledee takes over. The people are lulled into thinking

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that there has been a change. Then, when people are sick and tired of Tweedledee, there is another revolution and Tweedledum comes back into power. Again the people are lulled. Or gulled, if you prefer.

"The point is that, while you are fooling most of the people most of the time, you are hurting a few of the people all of the time. And they are trapped and can't get out of it."

"And that," I said, "is the pattern you were talking about."

Again he chuckled. "Oh, no. Far from it. That pattern is as old as Mankind. No, friend Gayle; I was talking about the pattern that has made a power group decide that you—*you,* Walt Gayle—were dangerous enough to kill." He touched Mirom's arm with one finger. "Would you be kind enough to turn the communicator back on, Miss Flood? We don't want to miss anything."

She did so, but it was only another musical program.

"In System B," Jeremiah continued, "things went a little bit differently. The government tried to prohibit space travel, to restrict it to official government-sponsored trips. But the paragravity drive is too easy to build if a group co-operates. Any aircar can be rebuilt to take a PG drive with a minimum of trouble.

"In System C, the government brought injunctions against the man who bought the drive from the Interstellar Traders, but he sold the rights to eighty-nine different companies and vanished—to his own little world. The swindled companies fought the injunctions to recoup their losses, won, and the same thing happened.

"In System D, the government bought the specifications from the company that bought from the Traders. That held things back for nearly ten years, but the secret leaked out, and the emigrations started."

He paused and looked at me. "See the pattern?"

"I see it," I said.

"What are we to do?" asked Mirom.

"Do?" Jeremiah repeated with a laugh. "Do? Why, you go into business and get your profits, my dear people. A businessman doesn't like to see a good thing go to waste, does he?" Then he gestured out the window. "Now, if you'll be so good as to point out the location of your little country villa, we'll see what can be done about this mess."

I added carbonated water to a good hooker of seafruit brandy and looked across the living room of my country house at Mirom, who was seated on the sofa sipping at her own drink. Jeremiah had taken the drink I'd mixed for him and blithely excused himself, saying he wanted to use my study and

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my private communicator. Mirom lifted her eyes and they met mine.

"Does that make us System E in the sequence?" she asked softly.

"I doubt it," I said. "More likely J or K—or maybe Z. We've got to face the fact that Barnesworld is a rather backward planet, Mirom. If—uh—certain powerful men know about A, B, C, and D, how many are there they don't know about?"

She nodded. "And how many that Jeremiah didn't mention? How many are there where the government succeeded in killing the man who bought the paragravity specifications from a Trader?"

I took a swallow of my drink. "Thanks for the cheering thought," I said.

"You're not dead yet, darling," she said, "and I don't think you will be. I trust Jeremiah."

"So do I, damn it, and I don't know why." I waved a hand in the general direction of my study. "We hardly know the man! It's only been a matter of hours, and yet here we are, doing exactly what he says, and—and *liking* it! Why?"

Her gray eyes looked straight into mine. "Maybe I'm a child, Walt. Maybe I'm a romantic. But I still say he's from the Double World. He's got mental powers that—that you and I can never understand."

"Fiddle-faddle! The Double World is a legend. And even if it isn't, Jeremiah denied it when you accused him of it."

She smiled a little. "Watch your pronouns, dear." Then the smile faded. "Besides, he didn't deny it. I asked him if he was a Trader because I've heard that Traders come from the Twin Planets. He laughed, remember? Then he said that he wasn't a Trader and that the Traders don't come from the Twin Planets. He never once said that *he* didn't come from there."

When I thought back, I realized she was right. "That still doesn't mean anything," I said stubbornly.

"No," she said softly, "I suppose not." She sipped at her drink again. "Walt?"

"Yes?"

"I've always thought our government was a good one, an honest one, one we could trust. Now I'm terrified."

I thought that over before I said anything. "I don't think it's the government as such," I said after a moment. "Only certain individuals in it. I doubt if it's official government policy."

"You mean that the government is all right, but the people who are in office are wrong? Where do you draw the line, Walt? If you have a hundred men in the Council, how many of them can be warped and vicious while the Council remains hon-

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est? One? Ten? Fifty? Ninety-nine?"

Before I could answer that one, Jeremiah came out of my study, an empty glass in his hand. "Drink up, my hearties. Time to go. Come along."

"What now?" I asked. Mirom was already on her feet.

"Back to the city. We're not safe here any longer. Hurry."

Two minutes later, we were back in the aircar, heading south toward the city. The night was black, now. The bright gem of Two had set, and only a sprinkling of stars gleamed in the sky.

Jeremiah had settled himself comfortably in the driver's seat. "Gayle," he said conversationally, "you're a good businessman. What would you do if you found that every time a customer bought one of your products, he became violently sick?"

"I'd stop all sales of the product and find out what was wrong with it," I replied immediately.

"But what if the product wasn't at fault?"

"I'd still stop sales. I'd investigate until I found out what was wrong. Hell, you've got to protect your customer."

"Excellent, Gayle! Excellent! You're a man after my own heart. Now, suppose you're an Interstellar Trader."

"I'm not stupid," I said. "I saw that one coming. The Traders don't give things away; they sell them. I'm a customer. I have exclusive rights on Barnesworld. I have to be protected. But why weren't the others protected, in those other systems you told us about?"

"These things take time, Gayle. If you accidentally sell a few hundred cases of poisoned berries, a lot of people are going to get sick before the news gets back to you and you can start an investigation going."

"This is the first investigation, then?"

"Not exactly. This is the first time the antidote has been administered in time."

"How do you equate poisoned berries with the paragravity effect?" I asked him.

"Haven't you ever heard that perfectly harmless berries can be poisonous to certain people? Allergy, my dear Gayle; allergy. There are certain kinds of governments which are allergic to paragravity—and other things, which we won't go into now. There is nothing wrong with the product; we have to cure the allergy. It requires rather drastic measures, but it can be done. Indeed, it *must* be done."

"How do you mean, 'drastic'?" I asked.

"Well . . ." There was a note of apology in his voice. "You have suffered some losses. Your office. Your apartment."

"They're insured," I said. "Be-

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sides, it wasn't your fault. I don't mind collecting damage insurance, but I'd just as soon my life insurance stays in effect for a while. You saved my life twice."

"I do believe you're developing a sense of humor, Gayle. But don't be too grateful." He glanced at the timepiece on the control panel. "Miss Flood, would you be so good as to tune in the news broadcast?"

The news came in loud and clear.

"This is Roj Harmon with the news from Capitol City. A flash bulletin has just come in. Only minutes ago, the country home of Walt Gayle, wanted for questioning in regard to the destruction of his office and home here in Capitol City, was bombed with deadly gas from an unidentified aircar. If anyone had been in the house, according to experts, he would have died within seconds. The damage to the house was slight, but the area around it was deadly for several minutes and is still unsafe. Police officers wearing gas masks report that the house was empty although the lights were on.

"A special communique from the *Capitol City Herald* reports that the entire incident was due to police laxity. According to the report, Gayle himself communicated with the *Herald* shortly before the gas bombing, saying that he had been in his country home, located a few kilometers east of Vysington, and knew nothing of the destruction of his office and city apartment. He was quoted as saying: 'It is apparent that someone or some group is attempting to kill me. I do not know why. I have reported to the police and have asked for police protection.'

"Subsequent investigation has shown this to be true, according to the *Herald* report. The police, said the *Herald,* had plenty of time to get to the Gayle home to prevent the attack and did not do so. The *Herald* demands an investigation. This station can verify officially the *Herald* report, since Mr. Gayle also communicated with the news office here before the bombing took place. Captain Varse, of the Vysington branch of the police, admitted that Gayle called his office and asked for protection. No explanation of the failure of the police to act has been forthcoming.

"Gayle's lawyer, the Honorable Janik Thrane, has also issued a statement. Gayle, he says, is filing suit against the police for neglect of duty and endangering the life of a citizen. The amount of the suit has as yet been undisclosed.

"On the North Coast, meanwhile, the eruption of Mount Cherongal has . . ."

Mirom turned the volume down low. I stared at Jeremiah.

"My apologies," he said before I could open my mouth. "I found it necessary to imitate your voice.

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We now have them blocked. You are vindicated, dear boy; vindicated."

"How?" I said at last. "I'm still not out of the soup." I was too confused to protest.

"Certainly you are. The government has to save face now."

"But *will* they?"

"How could they do else?"

"Mr. Jeremiah," Mirom interrupted, "just who are you?"

"Jeremiah." He smiled.

"I mean, what do you do? You're not from Barnesworld."

"No," he said, "I'm not. You're quite perceptive, Miss Flood. I'm sort of a troubleshooter, you might say."

"For the Interstellar Traders?"

"In a way. But mainly for humanity. Barnesworld is backwards, terribly so. And there are others—too many others—like it in the Galaxy. The Interstellar Traders, from the more advanced planets, try to spread knowledge through the Galaxy, but occasionally they have to call for help when they run into trouble. We try to oblige."

"By 'we' you mean—the Double World?" she asked slowly.

He nodded. "Yes. As I said, you're very perceptive, Miss Flood. Most people in this sector think the Twin Planets are just a legend."

I found my own voice. "You mean you really are a Loonairthian?"

He nodded again. "Yes. You've slurred the name. We call the Double World—Luna-Earth. Actually, the planets are not twins, though they revolve about a common center. Luna is smaller, but we've had paragravity for more two thousand years.

"Knowledge, you see, must be spread slowly and carefully."

I had nothing to say.

Mirom suddenly turned up the volume on the communicator.

"Flash bulletin! An Interstellar Trader ship has entered the atmosphere above Capitol City. A communication demands immediate protection for their customer, Mr. Walt Gayle. They . . ."

But I didn't listen. Above the city, I could see the great bulk of the gigantic interstellar ship, glowing in the lights from the city itself.

"They've been waiting in a high orbit," Jeremiah said softly. "You're perfectly safe now, Gayle. You can go on about your business."

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DESYNCHRONOSIS

by Theodore L. Thomas

THE MALADY CALLED DESYNchronosis is a disarray of the body's metabolic functions. It occurs when a man swiftly travels from his own part of the world to another part on a different time schedule. A New Yorker pops over to Baghdad where it is 9 o'clock in the morning and everybody is starting the day's work. But the New Yorker's body is geared to the time of one o'clock in the morning back in New York when decent citizens are in bed. So his body reacts by exhibiting fatigue, mental dullness, confusion, and upset stomach. He's in no shape to do much of anything useful. The armed services and many corporations have been finding this out. It takes 4 to 7 days to get back to a condition that is approximately normal.

It used to be thought that sleep was the only body function that followed the accustomed day-night cycle. It now turned out that the adrenal glands do, too. A few hours before a man normally awakens, the adrenals begin to discharge adrenalin into the bloodstream. Only in this manner can the body be brought to its physical and mental peak. In desynchronosis, the adrenals do their work on their original schedule, one that is out of time with the existing schedule. And the adrenals aren't all. Body temperatures fluctuate on the accustomed schedule. It has now been established that in treating some diseases, the drugs had better be given on the basis of the patient's original time zone.

The aerospace medical people are not too concerned with desynchrony among astronauts. For one thing, they can keep to the schedules of the mother country. But on the moon, things may be different unless the men can stick to their original schedules. Mars will be no problem once the men settle down. Its day is only 37 minutes longer than an earth day.

The deeper the scientists look, the more built-in cycles they find in the human body. Almost certainly there will be more. The twice-a-day cycle of the ocean tides

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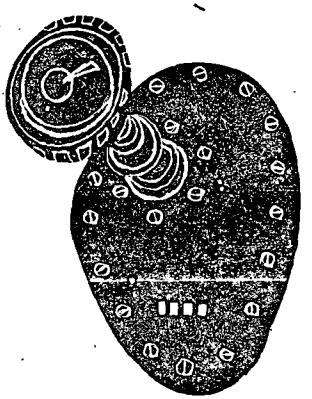
is probably there. Perhaps there is also imbedded a subtle four-a-year cycle to account for the four seasons of the temperate zones. A large-scale cycle of a year might be there, too, exerting some unknown influence. Since we are creatures of the sun, the sun's cycles might be impressed on us, cycles of flares, sunspots and all. In short, we might be more earthlings than we think, firmly and irrevocably wedded to the surgings and cyclings of good mother earth.



COMING NEXT MONTH

They had come a long way from the vindictiveness of the Old Testament abjuration, an eye for an eye . . .

Now a criminal's mind could be wiped clean of the memories which haunted him, the memories which drove him and made of him the criminal that he was. And, in the place of these poluted memories, new ones could be planted—soft memories, gentle memories, memories of . . . *what?*

I REMEMBER OBLIVION, by **Henry Slesar,** provides a chilling answer.

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This is the strange story of a confrontation between a Count and a Commissioner—between the dusty splendor of the past and the hesitant future. Its result will come as a nightmarish surprise, but you can believe the story or not, just as you wish.

THE NEW MEN

by Joanna Russ

THIS IS THE STORY OF COMMISSIONER Ivan Mihailovich Glespov, who traveled from the Russian border to the experimental virology clinic near Lwow, and you may believe it or not, just as you wish. I got it from a friend, who got it from another friend, who got it from a French journalist in Prague, who had become curious about the Socialist government's latest cultural effort to restore the architectural monuments of Poland; and who swears that among the cultural embassies the two great uneasy friends have been slinging at each other lately (we have all seen the results on television) this one is different and he has chapter and verse to prove it. But the French are like that.

A few years ago, in the winter of 1985 or 1986, the local driver employed by Commissioner Glespov—who was traveling in a private car in the direction already mentioned—lost his way near dusk, and they found themselves in a Polish country road, bouncing over ruts frozen steel-hard, between fields that were as white—and as flat—and as dreary—as one can possibly imagine. Commissioner Glespov, who was watching the landscape out of a particular personal unease, noted only a few huts or farm buildings at first gray in the white and then a darker gray against the graying

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dusk, but he saw—or thought he saw—a kind of *chateau* set in the middle of the fields; upon which he turned up the heating control (they were traveling in a '72 Chevrolet bought from the American embassy) to the highest position (he was still shivering,) rapped on the glass partition and said:

"What's that? Is that a museum?"

But he never found out, for at this point the car's engine died. They came to a stop. Commissioner Glespov (he had been in charge of the urban vehicular transport of a large city in the Ukraine) sat wrapped in his lap-robe while the driver went outside and tried to start the motor; but at length the driver disappeared down the road, with many apologies in rural Polish, while Glespov (who was already beginning to grow cold) rolled up the window and sat looking out onto fields fast indistinguishable from the gathering night. At length he began to think that his driver was not coming back—or at least not soon—and when he saw, or thought he saw, a light in the *chateau,* he gathered his lap-robe about him, stepped out of the car, and trudged across the fields.

The *chateau* was a kind of mansion. It was an overblown 18th century Petit Trianon and rather ludicrous out in the middle of the fields, but half in ruin of course, with part of the upper storeys missing, and fallen stonework all around it. It reminded Glespov strongly of a motion-picture set he had seen once on a visit to the Kazakh Regional Film Center, when the company was engaged in filming a historical epic based on Pushkin's poems, and he stood and gaped at the building with his lap-robe trailing behind him, like an old man in a bathrobe who has just taken out all his teeth. But Glespov was decisive—there were years when he had had to be—and he was not interested in sensations but in a place to sleep; so he knocked and tried out his execrable Polish on the peasant who answered. The man let him in. Although Glespov saw at once that the place was uninhabited, it was out of the cold and he had no mind to start back across the fields immediately. I also believe he had a sneaking curiosity to see the country-house from the inside and form some idea of how the gentry lived when they did live, for it occurred to him that the film set might not have been entirely accurate. So he waved aside the peasant, who was talking to him earnestly in language he could not understand, sat down on what was left of the grand staircase, and was about to shout angrily that he was a sick man and must be left in peace (Glespov had been famous at one

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time for his rages) when he realized that there was a third person in the room. Someone—holding a candle—was standing in the shadowy end of the grand ballroom, just standing and looking at Commissioner Glespov, and not indicating by even a flicker of the candlelight whether or not he liked what he saw or what he was going to do about it.

Glespov's first reaction, as he afterwards confessed, was nothing at all. He expected the "old people," as he called the country people, to use candles in out-of-the-way places; Russians, better than anyone else, know the difficulty of changing rural thinking. It was only when the third person moved forward and Glespov got a good look at him that Glespov became frightened; not that he was a superstitious man or thought he was seeing ghosts, but for reasons quite different. Sixty years before, he would have run out into the fields to rouse the villagers, cold or no cold; forty years before he might have run for the police; but contemporary Glespov had no wild thoughts about witnessing the presence of one of the old aristocracy, nor did he believe in actual counter-revolutionary plots. He did think for a minute of running for the alienist. It even occurred to him that he might be going mad himself, but he had never done so before and saw no reason why he should begin now; thus he merely sat and stared at his host; and I believe that some part of him exclaimed with satisfaction: "This is better than the Kazakh Film Center!"

And indeed it was. The gentleman that Glespov saw advance into the room was a *gentleman* in a sense that no one is, or has been, in Europe for some time. He put his candle down on an immense oak table in the center of the room and stood behind it, against dusty, torn hangings that had been antiques three hundred years before; and the candlelight dimly and delicately picked out the lace at his cuffs, the gold embroidery on his coat, the glittering folds of the black cloak he held over one arm, all the trappings of nobility that no living man has worn in Europe —or anywheres else—for more than thirteen generations.

"Aha, so you're making a film?" said Glespov while the stranger, turning to the peasant who had stood obsequiously at the door all this while, said something very sharp; and the peasant vanished immediately. The door swung shut with a little click. The stranger brought his face down to the level of his candle—he appeared to be sitting down on a bench next to the table—and the shadows flowed after themselves over his face, turning it sinister, flat, and then hollow, all in turn. Glespov saw a young man, pale, lean, expressionless, with hair

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falling untidily to his shoulders. The young man said:

"I am the Count Jan Wisniowiecki."

Glespov answered, a bit apologetically (and he was sorry the minute the words left his mouth):

"There are no classes in the People's Republic of Poland!"

"I don't follow such things," said the stranger, perfectly unruffled, "You must tell me about them yourself," and he rose, picked up the candle, and stepped across the long stone floor to what seemed to Glespov to be a fireplace, where he stooped and lit the kindling that was piled not very neatly in the center. The light of the little fire threw wobbly shadows all over the room, making it look more than ever like a cavern: the big table, the bench, a kind of wardrobe that appeared to have escaped utter ruin, and portraits on the walls, ranks of them, all kinds of them, but all infinitely dirty, infinitely uncared-for, the kind of thing that would happen to a museum if it were no longer a museum but a haunt for field-mice, rabbits, the rain, scavengers, and all kinds of bad weather. Glespov shivered.

"Count—?" he said.

"Jan Wisniowiecki," said the other, "Descended from the great Jagiello." He spoke Russian but with some accent. "You'll be more comfortable now," he said. Glespov got to his feet with an effort. He intended to make some excuse about his driver and go, but before he could open his mouth the peasant who had let him in returned through the front door and locked it, plodding across the floor to hand the key to his master, but very reluctant to get too close to him. It occurred to Glespov that this madman had what he himself had never possessed; that is, the power to inspire absolute terror, and for a single moment he felt immensely envious; he even thought "Yes, they had something in the old days," and he watched with awe as the servant came by him, for the man was literally shaking in his shoes. The Count jabbed the air with his thumb, and the servant fetched from the wardrobe a bottle and glass which he placed on the table.

"We shall have to put you up down here," said the Count. "If you were to go upstairs, you would be quite open to the weather; it is all a ruin up there," and he nodded as Glespov poured himself a drink—brandy, as Glespov saw on the bottle, reading with difficulty. He wiped his mouth, trembling, with the back of his hand, and poured himself another glass, saying "Ah! that's something, my dear fellow!"

"Yet, that's something," said the Count, watching his guest drink with a quiet, intent and altogether vigilant regard, a kind of still intensity that puzzled Gles-

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pov, who poured himself a third brandy, saying after he drank—he had a kind of superstitious belief in the medicinal value of alcohol—

"So you really live here, eh?" That made him nervous, to say it. He looked carefully at the Count. He clucked to himself and stared about the big room, remembering what his wife had recently read in *Gazeta Literaturnaya* about the new Freudian analysis of characters. He said "Not that some of your things aren't —very beautiful—full of culture —" and remembering his summer villa on the Black Sea, furnished with what seemed to him the quintessence of modernity, he longed to be back on the terrace, overlooking the sparkling blue waves and playing bridge. He said "Yes, very cultured, but still—!" and downed his brandy. It was better than nothing, though he longed for food. It was better, in fact, than any he had ever tasted (though perhaps not as strong as what he was used to) so he took another.

"Everything in this house is old," said the Count, with no particular expression on his young face; he shook his sleeve taking out therefrom a lace handkerchief; and Glespov saw (through an increasing brandy fog) that all his clothes were old, old and incredibly dirty, incredibly dusty, like clothes left too long in an attic until the dust is a gauze film over everything and underneath can be glimpsed—but only dimly and inaccurately—the original beauty, as if embalmed, like half-razed letters on an old monument. Glespov blinked. He said "You come here sometimes, eh?" He thought of the neurotic character as defined by his wife from the article in *Gaz. Lit.* and about the fixation to the past which corresponds, in a social sense, to an attempt to escape the dialectic of the historical process; he thought "nostalgia; yes, yes," and shivered a little, for he had always had the deepest respect for the historical process, even when his daughter was disciplined for deviationist remarks in high school. He said blurrily, "Well, you're young," and nodded a few times to the Count—now by his side in some unaccountable manner—helped him up and over to a cot on the far side of the great fireplace, holding his elbow with unwavering courtesy, remarking his stumbling and his yawns and shivers without the slightest comment. Glespov found himself shouting suddenly "You're young! You're young!" and trying to pull off his expensive, conservative shoes, recalling the urban transit authority and scenes from the opera of Lermontov's life, but all mixed up—no doubt because of the brandy—with memories of his daughter's terrible disgrace and the motion-

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picture studio in Kharkhov, where he had chatted for half an hour with a young actress and had permitted himself the rare indulgence of imagining what it might be like to have an affair with a really pretty woman—though he had always been very fond of his wife who was a physician and had wide interests. Then he fell asleep and maintains that he remembers nothing else until morning.

However, from certain documents and various bits of evidence, it did become clear that mixed up with all this material was something else, and that in the middle of the night, Ivan Mihailovich Glespov had a rather extraordinary dream. He dreamed (though he later denied it) that he heard a voice calling his name softly and opened his eyes to find his host bending over him in the light from the dying fire. He said that the young man's grey eyes were as clear as a child's and his face as fresh and pale; he sat next to Glespov, smiling gravely, and said:

"Ivan Mihailovich, you must tell me about the People's Republic of Poland."

But Glespov could not say a word. Then it seemed to him that the young man held him with his eyes until, in his mind, there appeared a vision of the room as it had once been in life, and that against the living presence of long-dead splendor, the beautiful women, the glasses, the elegant company, even the furniture, he —Commisioner Glespov—was ashamed and could find nothing at all to say. At length, said Glespov, he managed to whisper "But it's gone! it's all gone!" and the Count—who seemed extraordinary handsome at this point, though it puzzled Glespov to be able to see him in the dark, as the fire had quite clearly gone out —murmured gently "Aren't you too afraid of death, Comrade?" which remark (said Glespov) chilled him to the heart, for such thoughts had been much in his mind lately. He was not a well man. He tried to cry out, but as one does in dreams, could not; he tried to get out of bed and could not do that either; then it occurred to him that he was asleep, upon which he tried to open his eyes, fleeted through a long succession of dreams in which he woke, fell asleep, got up, found himself again, and finally woke up.

The fire was very low and smoking. The uncurtained high window, half boarded-up, showed through occasional openings the deep blue of the beginning of dawn. It was very cold. Sick, dizzy, shivering in the dusty blankets he had drawn round his overcoat, the Commissioner managed to sit up. He was afraid he had grown much worse during the night. He got out of bed,

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clacking his false teeth half in nervousness and half absent-mindedly: gray-haired, stooped, weak and wrinkled, the very prototype of an old man. He envied his host's youth. He wandered a few steps over the cold stone floor when a bundle of rags caught his eye under one of the windows. He had already started towards it when it began to move; he did not realize for a second what it was, but stopped in a premonition of unpleasantness (he thought it might be an animal come through some break in the walls from outside in the fields) and then something pale turned up and outward from the bundle of rags. It was the face of the Count.

Never, says Glespov, had he gone through anything like that. Never, although he had served in the Battle of Moscow and had gone through his share of liberating the concentration camps, never had he seen insanity like that. The man was crouching below the window on all fours like an animal, his face was white as paper and disfigured with a long smear of blood, and for his expression—Glespov, who had been in the War, would not speak of it; it was mere insane rage, it was diseased, it was unhuman. Glespov, who could hardly stand for illness, was in a better way than the Count, who could not stand at all; yet he dragged himself across the floor, tearing his clothes on the stone and inspiring Glespov with an irrational horror above the terrified weakness he already felt, *a horror* (so he said) *of seeing the madman's private parts,* for it seemed to him that a body so wracked, so driven, so abused must long ago have been turned into a thing, a puppet, a piece of wood; and that such a puppet should still carry the intestines, the skin, the organs of a human being, seemed to him thoroughly unbearable. The Count had risen to his feet, swaying, and stumbled upon Glespov with fists clenched above his head; the Commisisoner, terrified, could not move; the dry, distorted, shocking white face hissed out *"You! Poisoner!"* and at that moment the Count's body, dead as a log of wood, fell on top of Commissioner Glespov, burying him (he said) in an avalanche like the contents of an ancient wardrobe, dusty, choking, smothering and horrible. He fainted. When he woke, sunlight was streaming through the windows and the Count was gone.

Commissioner Glespov, a sick man, past sixty, gathered his lap-robe around his coat and staggered out of that Polish country mansion, cold or no cold—into the arms of his driver, who had been trying to force the door since sunrise.

And that is why, according to a French journalist stationed in Prague, the Soviet government has

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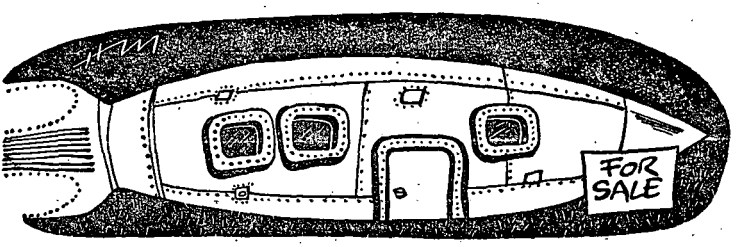
been so insistent lately about restoring the architectural monuments of Poland. If you put your ear to the Polish earth, says he, you can all but hear them: like a team of beavers, tapping walls, crating statuary, opening crypts, and excavating foundations; they are admired by the country people for their vitality, their cheerfulness, their square haircuts and their gold teeth and the Polish government is absolutely furious.

Glespov died several months later, quite comfortably, at the virology clinic near Lwow despite the advanced treatments for leukemia given him at that truly admirable institution.

But you can believe the story or not, just as you wish.



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The computers were refusing to predict beyond the year 2060. The rising anxiety grew to a sense of impending doom. Yet no one could pinpoint the reasons—until Regent paid a visit to the circus.

THE WAY BACK

by D. K. Findlay

IT BEGAN AS A RISING ANXIETY, everyone felt it. Some people described it as a feeling that they were being watched all the time. Others experienced bursts of panic fear that set them running—it did not matter where they ran, they had to run somewhere.

Many joined in the movement to go live in the open spaces of Arizona and Canada. Among those who remained in the old cities there were emotional outbursts and strange scenes. It seemed that the expectation of some world-wide catastrophe had become universal.

One evening Regent, a young career man in the Office of Public Order met an old friend in the crowd, Holcomb, a biologist. They had been boys together, now they rarely saw each other. Regent had risen quickly through the ranks of Control, he was marked for high office; Holcomb remained an obscure teacher with a reputation of having a leaning towards heretical theories.

"What do you make of all this?" Regent asked him.

"I am reminded of the lemmings."

"I seem to have heard of them."

"A mouse-like creature, now extinct. At a certain point in their population cycle, when they were numerous, they ran about aimlessly; they left their homes and travelled great distances. Eventually they reached the sea and were drowned."

"We have population control."

"I wasn't thinking of over-population. I was considering the fact that the creatures became nervous-

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ly disorganized. Like these." He waved his hand at the crowd. "We seem to have a parallel here. This unease seems to be the nervousness of a whole species. It may be that some instinct has informed man that his existence as the dominant species is threatened."

"We know pretty well that there is no other dominant species. We have spent billions in space and found none."

"I was not thinking of outer space. All species come to an end, you know. They are usually destroyed by some other species. What is this rumor about the computers?"

Regent looked around cautiously to see that he was not overheard. "It is true. They refuse to predict beyond the year 2060."

"Is it a case of man influencing the machine?"

"No, we know there is nothing wrong with the programming. Calculations are not affected, they go on to infinity. It is only when a prophetic projection is required that they do not answer or answer without meaning. For example, if you ask how much power will be required by transit Alpha in 2061, they will tell you. But if you ask how many passengers will use transit Alpha in 2061, they will not answer or answer 'none.'"

"Very odd."

"The mathematicians think it is because the stored memory indicates some trend that we have not yet recognized. Don't repeat the story, it will only increase the disorders."

"Listen—"

The crowd had heard it too—the sound of a siren—and immediately became quiet, not the quiet of fear but interest. Down the avenue came officers of the Corps of Public Order preceding a car in which rode the Director of the Civic Arts. The body of her limousine was of glass so that all might see her. She was breath-taking, a superb example of the blended blood, white, brown, yellow and black.

Her office was not important but her power was almost equal to that of the leaders of the government. For the people loved her, they gave her the adulation that used to be given to queens and famous actresses. They never tired of repeating the legends of her origins, a poor girl from one of the outer isles of Asia, who had risen to wealth and power because of her beauty and personal magnetism.

Now the people pressed about her car, shouting her name.

"Lila! Lila!"

She smiled for them, she waved a hand. The car proceeded slowly so that all might have a good look. As it came opposite the two friends Lila noticed Regent. She gave him a swift private gesture as she passed.

"So the rumors are true," said

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Holcomb. "You are a lucky man."

Regent, handsome and ardent, was looking after the retreating car. "Wherever Lila is there are rumors. Look at the way the people run after her car."

"Does she like travelling in that rather noisy way?"

"No. She does it on account of the people, who like to see her. She is really a part of the machinery of Public Order, she does easily what we have to do by force."

"And all these stories—?"

"Are just stories."

"They say she has some sort of organization of her own. Almost a private army."

"She doesn't need a private army. It is a pleasure and a privilege to serve her. She dazzles us all."

"It is pretty clear that she has dazzled you," said Holcomb. "It is a pity she can't have children. Her particular blend of blood which makes her so beautiful has also made her sterile."

"What would happen if she became pregnant?"

"One chance in a million. The child would be stillborn, she herself might die of the M.F. blood disease."

"She nearly died of it three years ago. She was very ill; it was kept quiet."

"Will you take me to see her sometime?"

Regent was amused. "Why? Has she dazzled you as well?"

"She was Dr. Phorus' last patient. He was my teacher, you know, an authority on blood disease. He attended her during that illness you mention. I am writing a memorial on his work, the authorities seem strangely indifferent to him, almost a conspiracy of silence."

Rumors began to be heard from the people who had left the cities to live in the empty spaces, the deserts, the far-off islands. The stars were growing brighter, they said, they seemed to be coming closer. Also there were strange lights in the heavens they had never seen before.

The observatories of the world were beseiged for their opinions but they gave evasive answers. People, they said, were always finding that the stars seemed brighter in the open spaces; there were always strange lights in the heavens, especially in times of trouble. They pointed out that the presence of certain gases or a thinning of the earth's atmosphere would give the impression that the celestial bodies were closer and brighter.

There was one question they categorically refused to answer. Any announcement on that subject would have to come from the government.

By now it seemed clear to everyone that the stars were indeed brighter and clearer; crowds stood

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still in the streets to watch and refused to move. Reluctantly, the government made the announcement: there was some evidence that the universe had ceased to expand and had begun to contract.

The news ran about the world in a flash, setting off panics and riots. In an attempt to calm the people, the scientists declared that even if no other factor intervened, contraction was a long process, there would be something like eighty-three million years before the universe came together in an enormous explosion.

Regent visited Holcomb in his modest living quarters.

"What do you think now?"

"If the universe has begun to contract and the cosmic clock has turned backward, then evolution will reverse itself. The big question is: will it retrace the same steps in the same order? Will we go down the ladder again, through paws and tails and fins, back to the reptiles and beyond to the sea?"

"Not likely. We know too much. Man is still in control."

"For how long? Think—if the cosmic clock has already turned back, there are among us creatures which reflect the change, the beginning of the change downward. No wonder man as a species has become nervous."

Only Lila refused to take the situation seriously. She gave a grand ball, an End of the World party, to which people were invited to attend in the costumes they wished to meet the last day. The ball was a great success except for the affair of Holcomb.

Some time before, Regent had asked Lila in a private interview if he might bring Holcomb to her.

"He's not distinguished or influential but he is honest and well-meaning and an old friend."

"What does he want?"

"He's a biologist, he is preparing a memorial to one of his teachers who attended you at one time. He thinks his work was not appreciated by the authorities."

"Very well." She was not much interested. She had just come from the bath, her skin, the color of a nectarine, glowed with its even luster. She wore a wig to match it; her own hair was dark and shaggy and was usually kept covered. She had strange eyes, brown with yellow lights, in which the legend said no one had ever seen tears.

"Come here," she said.

He approached diffidently.

"What is this I hear about your having a girl?"

He was taken by surprise, he stammered. "A girl?—I have no girl—"

"I do not wish you to have a girl. There is plenty of time for girls. No girls for you until I say so. Kiss me."

He trembled. She laughed. "I like men to tremble."

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When the time came at the ball to present Holcomb, Regent felt a few misgivings. Holcomb had forgotten to wear a costume or had not been told to; he looked out of place among the elaborately-dressed officials. He looked small and humble and Lila did not care for small, humble men. But Regent was not prepared for the explosion which followed.

He had led him up the grand stairway to the hall where Lila was receiving favored guests and introduced him. Lila received him graciously, overlooking his lack of costume, and Regent, relieved, stepped back out of earshot. Holcomb had scarcely begun to speak when there was an extra-ordinary change in Lila. She came to a blaze with anger. She raised her voice in fury.

"Get this man out of here! At once."

Regent hurried him away.

"What on earth did you say to her?"

Holcomb was shaken and bewildered. "I don't know—I had hardly begun—I just spoke of her illness and Dr. Phorus being in attendance on her when she flew into a rage. 'I forbid you to speak of that man,' she said. Why is she so mad at him?"

"I don't know."

"I don't understand."

"I don't understand either. But it is no slight thing to incur Lila's displeasure—your job hangs by a thread. Give up this idea of writing a biography, forget about Dr. Phorus."

Holcomb, though pale, was obstinate. "He was a good man and a good doctor. And he died in her service."

"How did he die?"

"Of M.F. blood infection, according to the hospital records. Two members of the staff and a nurse died at the same time."

"Take my advice, forget the whole business."

These were troubled days for the Department of Public Order and Regent was busy. A week later Holcomb appeared on his visual.

"Will you come with me tonight? I have seen something very strange."

"Has it anything to do with Dr. Phorus?"

"I think I know why he died. That is only part of it, I think I am on to something important, desperately important. Will you come with me?"

But Regent was out of patience with Holcomb, he was brusque, he refused. A few days afterward, he saw Holcomb's name on the list of missing persons.

Regent himself took charge of the investigation. Holcomb had not appeared at his lodging-house, his pupils had not seen him. Regent could find no clue as to the reason for his disappearance. He

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had left no message, his affairs seemed to be in order. There was no record of an arrest or his being admitted to a hospital. He had vanished into the air.

Then one night he saw him again on the Watcher.

It had long ago been found necessary to monitor the movements of the people. The Watcher cameras were as common as traffic lights used to be; day and night they scanned the streets and squares and places of public resort. Regent was studying the tapes of the previous days when Holcomb's picture leaped out at him. He was walking along in a crowd and it was clear that he was in a state of excitement.

The experts were brought in to comment on the tapes.

"This is a part of the crowd leaving the theater area. The time, eleven o'clock, also coincides."

Regent looked at a list of theater offerings but he could find nothing there to attract Holcomb.

"I do not think he was at a theater."

"There is also a circus."

The circus, which for a time had almost disappeared, had become popular again. As a young man Holcomb had gone often, he was always interested in the animals.

"Has this circus a menagerie?"

Yes, there was a menagerie—elephants, tigers, the usual circus animals.

Regent thought about it: he remembered Holcomb's speculation that the process of evolution might now be in reverse. Was it possible that he had seen among the animals of the menagerie something that might explain his excitement?

He decided to pay the circus a visit.

He was expected that night at Lila's. He called on her visual to say that he could not come.

She was not pleased. "Why?"

"Official business. A disappearance. You remember Holcomb the little biologist who had the bad luck to annoy you? He has disappeared. We are tracing his movements."

"I had forgotten him. Let someone else look for him."

"You see, I feel somewhat responsible. He spoke to me the night he disappeared—he was quite excited. He said he had seen something extraordinary, he wanted me to go with him somewhere. But I wouldn't go. Now we have a clue, we have his picture on the Watcher tape."

"Where had he been?"

"He was coming from the amusement area. Perhaps the circus."

She was surprised. "I thought only children went to the circus."

"Oh, people still go. Wherever he had been, he seemed quite excited."

"Let someone else look for him.

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I want you." She came close on the screen, a mark of intimacy, and looked at him directly. She knew her power, no man could resist her.

"I'll come," he said.

But instead, taking a long chance, he went to the circus.

There it seemed that he had needlessly risked his career, for there seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary at the circus. He watched the animals and they were the usual menagerie animals. He saw the freaks and they were the usual abnormalities. There were dwarfs among the clowns but they were the usual dwarfs imported from the outlands.

A girl fell from a high trapeeze that night; she missed the net and struck the ground. The crowd watched her apathetically as they watched any accident these days, it was a symptom of the times. She tried to raise herself and could not, she was carried off, her head hanging, and another act was hurried into the ring. It was a family of chimpanzees which wore clothes, rode bicycles and ate with knives and forks.

Regent was sitting close to them, he could smell their odor. The trainer brought in a young female in his arms; she was dressed in a brilliant yellow costume, blouse and pants and a party hat. He put her down and she sat ape-fashion, her arms dangling, watching not the trainer but the people in the seats. When the trainer spoke to her she paid no attention; when he spoke sharply, she looked at him with insolence, the cock of her head indicating she might do as she was told or she might not. Then, obeying, she swung herself forward with the rolling gait of the chimpanzee, touching the knuckles of one hand to the floor. But not quite like a chimpanzee—seen in contrast with the other chimpanzees the difference was apparent. There was something in the way she moved that reminded Regent

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of another movement he had often seen. Now she was seated only a few feet away, he could see her expression under her yellow hat. She looked directly at him and a shock of recognition exploded in his brain. He had seen those eyes before, tawny brown with yellow lights. Now that he recognized them, he saw other resemblances —in the figure, more human than ape, and in the face, more ape than human.

The eyes of the creature were fixed on him, they seemed to be studying him with sardonic malice. Almost he started up in his seat and stretched a hand to her— he checked himself and sank back.

As he did so he realized that the movement had probably cost him his life. A stream of perception flowed through his mind, instantly a whole pattern of events became clear. He knew now what had happened to Holcomb. He knew why Dr. Phorus had died and those other attendants too— anyone who had seen the birth. He knew now what would happen to him too. With the nerves in the back of his head he knew that he was being watched by someone in the seats behind.

He did not turn his head yet. He studied the creature tricked out in yellow blouse and pants with a stain down the inside of them. It was alive, oh, very alive. This was the baby born to Lila during her official "illness" three years before, born of her sterile blood, the baby that was the one chance in a million, which having been born should have died. But it had survived, here it was, the mutant, the beginning of a long tumble backward.

He sat quietly in his seat thinking about the future of mankind. The performance ended, the spectators left their seats. The arena was empty.

He felt a light tap on his shoulder.

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SCIENCE

UP AND DOWN THE EARTH

by Isaac Asimov

BOSTON IS GETTING ITS FACE lifted, and we now have "The New Boston."

The outstanding feature of The New Boston is the Prudential Center, which is an area of the Back Bay that has been renovated into New York-like glamour. It possesses a new hotel, the Sheraton-Boston, and, most spectacular of all, a beautiful skyscraper, the 52-story Prudential Tower, which is 750 feet tall.

Last summer, I invaded the center for the first time. I was asked to join a panel discussion dealing with the future of industrial management. (Fred Pohl of Galaxy was another member of the panel.) The panel was held in the Sheraton-Boston under conditions of great splendor and after the dinner that followed, the manager of the hotel announced, in the course of a short talk, that the Prudential Tower was the tallest office building in continental North America.

We registered amazement and he at once explained that yes, there were indeed taller office buildings not far from Boston, but they were not on continental North America. They were on an island off the shores of the continent; the island Manhattan.

And he was right. Outside the island of Manhattan, there is, at the moment of writing, no office building taller than the Prudential Tower anywhere in North America. (Perhaps anywhere in the world.)

It made me think at once that you can play a large number of games, if you are the record-gathering type (as I am), by altering qualifications slightly. Long before the manager's speech was over, I was thinking of mountains.

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Everyone knows the name of the highest mountain of the world. It is Mount Everest, located in the Himalayan Mountain Range, exactly on the border between Nepal and Tibet.

It is named for a British military engineer, George Everest, who spent much of his adult life surveying Java and India and who, from 1830 to 1843, was surveyor general of India. In 1852, when a mountain was discovered in the north, one which was at once suspected of being height-champion, it was named for him. At that, his name is easier to pronounce than the native Tibetan name for the mountain—Chomolungma.

The height of Mount Everest is usually given in the reference books as 29,002 feet above sea level, a value first obtained in 1860, though I believe that the most recent trigonometric measurements make it 29,141 feet. In either case, the tippy, tippy top of Mount Everest is the only piece of solid land on the face of the globe that is more than 29,000 feet above sea-level so that the mountain qualifies nicely as something quite unique. Using another unit of measure, Mount Everest is just a trifle more than five and a half miles high and all other land is less than five and a half miles above sea-level.

Except by members of the "Anglo-Saxon nations," however, mountain heights are generally measured in meters rather than in feet or miles. There are 3.28 feet in a meter and Mount Everest stands 8,885 meters above sea-level.

At once this gives rise to the question: how many other mountains are there that belong to the rarefied aristocracy of those that tower more than 8,000 meters above sea-level. The answer is: Not many. Just seven!

And here they are in Table 1.

Table 1—The 8000-Meter Mountains

Mountains	*Height* *Feet*	*Miles*	*Meters*
Everest	29,141	5.52	8,885
Godwin Austen	28,250	5.36	8,613
Kanchenjunga	28,146	5.33	8,582
Makalu	27,790	5.27	8,473
Dhaulagiri	26,810	5.10	8,175
Nonga Parbat	26,620	5.06	8,116
Gosainthan	26,291	4.98	8,016

Of these seven aristocrats all but one are in the Himalaya Mountain Range, spread out over a stretch of a little over 300

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miles. The exception is Mount Godwin Austen, which is named for Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen, another Britisher who was engaged in the 19th Century trigonometric surveys of India. It is only recently that the mountain came to be officially known by his name. Previously, it was known simply as K-2. Its native name is Dapsang.

Mount Godwin Austen is located about 800 miles northwest of Mount Everest and the other Himalayan towers. It is the highest peak of the Karakorum Mountain Range, running between Kashmir and Sinkiang.

Notice that all seven of the eight-thousanders are located in Asia and that all are located in the borderlands that separate India and China.

This is true, indeed, not only for the 7 highest but for the 22 highest (!) mountains in the world, so that the area is *the* place for mountaineers.

Of all mountains, Everest is obviously *the* mountain to climb.

The first serious attempt to climb it was made in 1922 and after a full generation of effort, eleven lives were lost on its slopes and no successes were scored. Then, on May 29, 1953, the New Zealander, Edmund Percival Hillary and the Sherpa, Tenzing Norkhay, made it. Since then, others have too.

You would think that with even Everest conquered, there would remain no more mountains unclimbed, but that is not so. Everest received a lot more attention than some of the other peaks. As of now (unless someone has sneaked up the slopes while I wasn't looking) the highest mountain still unconquered is Gosainthan, which is only the seventh highest.

The highest mountain range outside Asia is the Andes Mountain Range, running down the western edge of South America. The highest peak in the Andes is Mount Aconcagua, which stands 23,081 feet high. Despite the fact that Mount Aconcagua is the highest mountain peak in the world outside Asia, it is only the 23rd highest mountain peak in the world counting Asia.

For the records, here in Table 2, are the highest peaks in each of the continents. To soothe my national and regional pride, I will add the highest mountain in the 48 contiguous states, and in New England, too. (After all, I'm writing the article and can do as I please.)

To locate these mountains—

Mount Aconcagua is in Argentina, very close to the border of Chile, only 100 miles east of Valparaiso.

Mount McKinley is in south central Alaska, about 150 miles

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Table 2—The Highest Mountains by Regions

Region	*Mountain*	*Height Feet*	*Miles*	*Meters*
Asia	Everest	29,141	5.52	8,885
South America	Aconcagua	23,081	4.37	7,037
North America	McKinley	20,300	3.85	6,189
Africa	Kilimanjaro	19,319	3.67	5,890
Europe	Elbrus	18,481	3.50	5,634
Antarctica	Thorvald Nilson	15,400	2.92	4,695
48 States	Whitney	14,496	2.75	4,419
Australia	Kosciusko	7,328	1.39	2,204
New England	Washington	6,288	1.19	1,918

southwest of Fairbanks. The fact that it was the highest land in North America was discovered in 1896 and it was named after William McKinley, who had just been elected president of the United States. The Russians (who had owned Alaska before 1867) had called it "Bolshaya" ("large").

Mount Kilimanjaro is in northeastern Tanganyika, near the border of Kenya, and is about 200 miles from the Indian Ocean. Mount Elbrus is in the Caucasus Mountain Range, about 60 miles northeast of the Black Sea.

Mount Thorvald Nilson is part of the Queen Maud Mountain Range on the shores of the Ross Sea, south of New Zealand. The range was discovered by the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen, and was named for Maud, who was the youngest child of Edward VII of England and who was then Queen of Norway. I'm afraid I don't know who Thorvald Nilson was.

Mount Whitney is in California, on the eastern border of Sequoia National Park. It is only 80 miles west of Death Valley in which is to be found the lowest point of land in the 48 states (a pool called Badwater—and I'll bet it is—which is 280 feet below sea level). Mount Whitney is named for the American geologist, Josiah Dwight Whitney, who measured its height in 1864.

Mount Kosciusko is in the southeastern corner of Australia, on the boundary between the states of Victoria and New South Wales. It is the highest point of the range called the Australian Alps. I suspect it was discovered at the end of the 18th Century, when the Polish patriot, Thaddeus Kosciusko, was leading the last, forlorn fight for Polish independence, but I can't be sure.

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Mount Washington is located in the Presidential Mountain Range in northern New Hampshire, and we all know who it is named after.

By listing the high mountains by continents, I don't mean to imply that all high mountains are on continents. In fact, Australia, usually considered a continent (though a small one) possesses no particularly high mountains, while New Guinea to its north (definitely an island, though a large one) is much more mountainous and possesses dozens of peaks higher than any in continental Australia, and some that are quite respectable by any standards. Three Pacific Islands are notably mountainous and these are listed in Table 3.

Mount Carstensz is the highest mountain in the world that is not on a continent. Who it is named for I do not know, but it is in the western portion of New Guinea and is part of the Nassau Mountain Range, which is named for the Dutch royal family. I suspect that by now Indonesia has renamed both the range and the mountain or, more likely, has restored the original names, but I don't know what these might be.

Mount Cook is just a little west of center in New Zealand's southern island. It is named for the famous explorer, Captain Cook, of course, and its Maori name is Aorangi.

All the heights I have given for the mountains, so far, are "above sea-level."

However, remembering the manager of the Sheraton-Boston hotel, let's improve the fun by qualifying matters.

After all, the height of a mountain depends a good deal upon the height of its base. The Himalayan mountain peaks are by far the most majestic in the world; there is no disputing that. Nevertheless, it is also true that they sit upon the Tibetan plateau which is the highest in the world. The Tibetan "lowlands" are nowhere lower than some 12,000 feet above sea-level.

Table 3—Notable Island Mountains

Island	*Mountain*	*Height*		
		Feet	*Miles*	*Meters*
New Guinea	Carstensz	16,404	3.12	5,000
Hawaii	Mauna Kea	13,784	2.61	4,200
	Mauna Loa	13,680	2.59	4,171
New Zealand	Cook	12,349	2.34	3,662

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If we subtract 12,000 feet from Mount Everest's height, we can say that its peak is only 17,000 feet above the land mass upon which it rests.

This is not exactly contemptible, but by this new standard (base to top, instead of sea-level to top) are there any mountains that are higher than Mount Everest? Yes, indeed, there is, and the new champion is not in the Himalayas, or in Asia, or on any continent.

This stands to reason after all. Suppose you had a mountain on a relatively small island. That island may *be* the mountain, and the mountain wouldn't look impressive because it was standing with its base in the ocean depth and with the ocean lapping who knows how many feet up its slopes.

This is actually the case for a particular island. That island is Hawaii—the largest single unit of the Hawaiian Islands. The island of Hawaii, with an area of 4,021 square miles (about twice the size of Delaware) is actually a huge mountain rising out of the Pacific. It comes to four peaks of which the two highest are Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa (see Table 3).

The mountain that makes up Hawaii is a volcano actually, but most of it is extinct. Mauna Loa alone remains active. It, all by itself is the largest single mountain in the world, in terms of cubic content of rock, so you can imagine how large the whole mountain above and below sea-level must be.

The central crater pit of Mauna Loa is sometimes active but has not actually erupted in historic times. Instead, the lava flow comes from openings on the sides. The largest of these is Kilauea, which is on the eastern side of Mauna Loa, some 4088 feet (0.77 miles, or 1,246 meters) above sea-level. Kilauea is the largest active crater in the world and is more than 2 miles in diameter.

As though these distinctions are not enough, this tremendous four-peaked mount we call Hawaii becomes totally astounding if viewed as a whole. If one plumbs the ocean depths, one finds that Hawaii stands on a land base that is over 18,000 feet below sea-level.

If the oceans were removed from Earth's surface (only temporarily, please) then no single mountain on Earth could possibly compare with the breath-taking towering majesty of Hawaii. It would be by far the tallest mountain on Earth, counting from base to peak. Its height on that basis would be 32,036 feet (6.08 miles or 9,767 meters). It is the only mountain on earth that extends more than 6 miles from base to tip.

The vanishing of the ocean would reveal a similar, though smaller, peak in the Atlantic

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Ocean; one that is part of the Mid-Atlantic Mountain Range. For the most part, we are unaware of this mountain range because it is drowned by the ocean, but it is larger and longer and more spectacular than any of the mountain ranges on dry land, even than the Himalayas. It is 7000 miles long and 500 miles wide and that's not bad.

Some of the highest peaks of the range do manage to poke their heads above the surface of the Atlantic. The Azores, a group of nine islands and several islets (belonging to Portugal) are formed in this manner. They are about 800 miles west of Portugal and have a total land area of 888 square miles, rather less than that of Rhode Island.

On Pico Island in the Azores stands the highest point of land on the island group. This is Pico Alto ("High Mountain") which reaches 7,460 feet (1.42 miles or 2,274 meters) above sea-level. However, if you slide down the slopes of the mountain and proceed all the way down to the sea-bottom, you find that only one-quarter of the mountain shows above water.

The total height of Pico Alto from underwater base to peak is about 27,500 feet (5.22 miles or 8,384 meters) which makes it a peak of Himalayan dimensions.

While we have the oceans temporarily gone from the Earth, we might as well see how deep the ocean goes.

About 1.2 percent of the sea-bottom lies more than 6,000 meters below sea-level, and where this happens we have the various "Trenches". There are a number of these, most of them in the Pacific Ocean. All are near island chains and presumably the same process that burrows out the deeps also heaves up the island chain.

The greatest depth so far recorded in some of these deeps (according to the material available to me) is given in Table 4.

Table 4—Some Ocean Trenches

Trench	*General Location*	*Depth Feet*	*Miles*	*Meters*
Bartlett	S. of Cuba	22,788	4.31	6,948
Java	S. of Java	24,442	4.64	7,252
Puerto Rico	N. of Puerto Rico	30,184	5.71	9,392
Japan	S. of Japan	32,153	6.09	9,800
Kurile	E. of Kamchatka	34,580	6.56	10,543
Tonga	E. of New Zealand	35,597	6.75	10,853
Mariana	E. of Guam	35,800	6.79	10,915
Mindanao	E. of Philippines	36,198	6.86	11,036

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The figures for the depth of the deeps are by no means as reliable as those for the heights of mountains, of course, and I can't tell when some oceanographic ship will plumb a deeper depth in one or more of these deeps. The greatest recorded depth in the Mindanao Trench—and in the world—was plumbed only as recently as March, 1959, by the Russian oceanographic vessel, the "Vityaz."

The greatest depth in the Mariana Trench was actually reached by Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh in person on January 23, 1960, in the bathyscaphe, Trieste. This has been named the "Challenger Deep" in honor of the oceanographic vessel, the "H.M.S. Challenger" which conducted a scientific cruise from 1872 to 1876 all over the oceans and established modern oceanography.

In any case the point I want to make is that the oceans are deeper than any mountain is high.

Consider the greatest depth of the Mindanao Trench. If Mount Everest could be placed in it and made to nestle all the way in, the mountain would sink below the waves and waters would roll for 7,000 feet (1⅓ miles) over its peak. If the island of Hawaii were moved from its present location, 4500 miles westward, and sunk into the Mindanao Trench, it too would disappear entirely and 4,162 feet of water (⅘ of a mile) would flow above its tip.

If sea-level is the standard, then the lowest bit of the solid land surface on Earth, just off the Philippines, is about 3,200 miles east of the highest bit at the top of Mount Everest. The total difference in height is 65,339 feet (12.3 miles or 19,921 meters).

This sounds like a lot, but the diameter of the Earth is about 7,900 miles, so that this difference in low-high makes up only 0.15 percent of the Earth's total thickness.

If the Earth were shrunk to the size of my library globe (16 inches in diameter), the peak of Mount Everest would project only 0.011 inches above the surface and the Mindanao-Trench would sink only 0.014 inches below the surface.

You can see then, that despite all the extreme ups-and-downs I have been talking about, the surface of the Earth, viewed in proportion to the size of the Earth, is very smooth. It would be smooth, even if the oceans were gone and the unevennesses of the ocean bottom were exposed. With the oceans filling up most of the Earth's hollows (and concealing the worst of the unevennesses) what remains is nothing.

But let's think about sea-level again. If the Earth consisted of a universal ocean, it would take on the shape of an ellipsoid of revolution, thanks to the fact that the

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planet is rotating (see THE SHAPE OF THINGS, F & SF, September 1962). It wouldn't be a perfect ellipsoid because, for various reasons, there are deviations of a few feet here and there. Such deviations are, however, of only the most academic interest and for our purposes we can be satisfied with the ellipsoid.

This means that if Earth were bisected by a plane cutting through the center, and through both poles, the Earth's outline would be an ellipse. The minor axis (or shortest possible Earth-radius) would be from the center to either pole, and that would be 6,356,912 meters. The longest radius, or major axis, is from the center to any point on the equator. This is 6,378,388 meters (on the average, if we wish to allow for the fact that the equator is itself very slightly elliptical).

The equatorial sea-level surface, then, is 21,476 meters (70,000 feet or 13.3 miles) further from the center than the polar sea-level surface is. This is the well-known "equatorial bulge."

However, the bulge does not exist at the equator alone. The distance from center to sea-level surface increases smoothly as one goes from the poles to the equator. Unfortunately, I have never seen any data on the extra length of the radius (over and above its minimum length at the poles) for different latitudes.

I have therefore had to calculate it for myself, making use of the manner in which the gravitational field varies from latitude to latitude. (I *could* find figures on the gravitational field.) The results, which I hope are approximately right anyway, are included in Table 5.

Suppose, now, we measure heights of mountains not from just any old sea-level, but from the polar sea-level. This would serve to compare distances *from the center of the Earth,* and certainly that is another legitimate way of comparing mountain heights.

If we did this, we would instantly get a completely new perspective on matters.

For instance, the Mindanao-Trench dips down to 11,036 meters below sea-level; but that means below the sea-level at its own latitude, which is 10° N. That sea-level is 20,800 meters above the polar sea-level so that the greatest depth of the Mindanao-Trench is still some 9,800 meters (6.1 miles) *above* the polar sea-level.

In other words, when Peary stood on the sea-ice at the North Pole, he was six miles closer to the center of the Earth than if he had been in a bathyscaphe probing the bottom of the Mindanao Trench.

Of course, the Arctic Ocean has a depth of its own. Depths of 4500 meters (2.8 miles) have, I believe, been recorded in the Arctic.

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Table 5—The Earth's Bulge

Latitude	Extra length of Earth's radius		
	Feet	Miles	Meters
0° (equator)	70,000	13.3	21,400
5°	69,500	13.2	21,200
10°	68,000	12.9	20,800
15°	65,500	12.4	20,000
20°	62,300	11.8	19,000
25°	58,000	11.0	17,700
30°	52,800	10.0	16,100
35°	47,500	9.0	14,500
40°	41,100	7.8	12,550
45°	35,100	6.65	10,700
50°	29,000	5.50	8,850
55°	23,200	4.40	7,050
60°	17,700	3.35	5,400
65°	12,500	2.37	3,800
70°	8,250	1.56	2,500
75°	4,800	0.91	1,460
80°	2,160	0.41	660
85°	530	0.10	160
90° (poles)	0	0.00	0

This means that the bottom of the Arctic Ocean is nearly 9 miles closer to the center of the Earth than the bottom of the Mindanao Trench, and from this point of view, we have a new candidate for the mark of "deepest deep." (The south polar regions are filled up by the continent of Antarctica, so it is out of the running in this respect.)

And the mountains?

Mount Everest is at a latitude of about 30°. Sea-level there is 16,100 meters higher than polar sea-level. Add that to the 8,885 meters that Mount Everest is above its own sea-level mark and you find that the mountain is just about 25,000 meters (15.5 miles) above polar sea-level. But it is only 2.2 miles above equatorial sea-level.

In other words, when a ship is crossing the equator, its passengers are only 2.2 miles closer to the center of the Earth than Hillary was when he stood on Mount Everest's peak.

Are there mountains that can do better than Mount Everest by

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this new standard? The other towers of Asia are in approximately Mount Everest's latitude. So are Mount Aconcagua and some of the other high peaks of the Andes (though on the other side of the Equator).

Mount McKinley is a little over 60° N so that its sea-level is only some 5,000 meters above polar sea-level. Its total height above polar sea level is only 11,200 meters (7.0 miles), which is less than half the height of Mount Everest.

No, what we need are some good high mountains near the equator, where they can take full advantage of the maximum bulge of the Earth's mid-riff. A good candidate is the tallest mountain of Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro. It is about 3° S and is 5,890 meters high. To this one can add the 21,300-meter-high bulge it stands on, so that it is some 27,200 meters above polar sea-level (16.9 miles), or nearly a mile and a half higher than Mount Everest, counting from the center of the Earth.

And that is not the best, either. My candidate for highest peak by these standards is Mount Chimborazo in Ecuador. It is part of the Andes Mountain Range, in which there are at least 30 peaks higher than Mount Chimborazo. Mount Chimborazo is, however, at 2° S. Its height above its own sea-level is 6,300 meters. If we add the equatorial bulge, we have a total height of 27,600 meters above polar sea-level (17.2 miles).

If we go by the distance from the center of the Earth, then, we can pass from the bottom of the Arctic Ocean to the top of Mount Chimborazo and increase that distance by 32,100 meters, or just about 20.0 miles.

By changing the point of view then, we have three different candidates for tallest mountain on Earth: Mount Everest, Mauna Kea, and Mount Chimborazo. We also have two different candidates for the deepest deep: the bottoms of the Arctic Ocean and the Mindanao-Trench.

But let's face it. What counts in penetrating extreme depths or extreme heights is not mere distance, but difficulty of attainment. The greatest single measure of difficulty in plumbing depths is the increase of water pressure; and the greatest single measure of difficulty in climbing heights is the decrease of air pressure.

By that token, water pressure is highest at the bottom of the Mindanao-Trench, and air pressure is lowest at the top of Mount Everest, and therefore those are the extremes in practice.

Just as (if the beans and cods will forgive me) the Empire State Building is the tallest office building in North America in practice, even though it is not, strictly speaking, actually on the North American continent.

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Jack Vance's epic narrative of Cugel the Clever began in our December issue. However, each novelet is complete and may be enjoyed without reference to the previous story. Having been forced to set out on an abominable quest by Iucounu the Laughing Magician, Cugel is now on his way south. In THE MOUNTAINS OF MAGNATZ he runs into some formidable obstructions, but our unusual hero is not one to be long detained by local customs.

THE MOUNTAINS OF MAGNATZ

by Jack Vance

SHORTLY AFTER SUNRISE CUGEL crawled from the hillside byre where he had passed a dismal night. The sun, a wine-colored bubble behind high mist, cast no warmth; the air was damp and chill and carried a dank smoky reek. To stimulate his circulation Cugel clapped arms to thighs, jigged back and forth; then, blowing into his hands, he halted to survey the landscape which lay before him. To north and east spread a dense black forest; to the southeast mountains of a peculiar erratic configuration jutted into the sky; to the south lay the ocean. A cheerless, even forbidding landscape, with no hint of warmth, comfort or human habitation. Voicing a heartfelt curse against Iucounu the Laughing Magician, whose rancor had brought him to this northern wasteland, Cugel kindled a fire from furze and twigs, and settled to a savorless breakfast of black gallberries.

The meal at its end, Cugel leaned back to enjoy the warmth of the fire, but Firx, that agent of coercion implanted by Iucounu in Cugel's viscera, permitted no

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respite, and Cugel, grimacing, jumped to his feet.

Down the slope he walked, following what appeared to be an old road, and presently came to a brimming river. On the bank near a moored raft, four men in ragged garments sat around a fire.

Cugel halted to assess the situation; then, transferring a pair of jeweled buttons from his cloak to his pouch, he stepped forward.

The rogues did not improve on closer view. Their hair was long and matted, their faces were gnarled, with eyes like beetles and mouths showing foul yellow teeth. Withal their expressions were mild and they watched Cugel's approach with wariness rather than belligerence. One of them, so it appeared, was a woman, though this was hardly apparent from garments, face or refinement of manner. Cugel gave a salute of lordly condenscension, at which they blinked in puzzlement.

"What people are you?" asked Cugel.

"We call ourselves Busiacos," responded the oldest of the men. "It is both our race and our family; we make no differentiation, being somewhat polyandrous by habit."

"You are denizens of this dismal region, familiar with its routes and trails?"

"Such is a fair description," admitted the man. "The forest across the river is the Great Erm, or as others call it, the Forest of the East, or the Lig Thig. To the south are the Mountains of Magnatz, which are reputedly dreadful."

"In what respect?" inquired Cugel. "The knowledge is of importance, since it seems that I must cross these mountains."

The Busiaco shook his head. "In this regard I can offer only the same sinister hints which were rendered to me."

Cugel looked from raft to river and then to the dense forest beyond. "The altruism and energy of the Busiacos are everywhere known," he stated. "Hence I feel no qualms in requesting your assistance across the river, as well as your guidance through the forest."

The eldest Busiaco showed little interest in the project, but the man next in age had a sudden idea, and stared unblinkingly at raft and river as if pondering. The effort presently overwhelmed him, and he shook his head in defeat.

Cugel, observing carefully, asked, "What baffles you?"

"A problem of no great complexity," replied the Busiaco. "We have small practice in logic and any difficulty thwarts us. I only speculated as to which of your belongings you might exchange for the services you request."

Cugel gave a light-hearted laugh. "I own only what you see: garments, shoes, cape and sword, all indispensable. Though, for a

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fact, I know an incantation which might produce a single jeweled button."

"This would be small inducement. In a nearby crypt jewels are heaped as high as my head."

Cugel rubbed his jaw reflectively. "The spectacle must be one of great splendor! Perhaps you will see fit to lead me past this crypt."

The Busiaco made a gesture of indifference. "If you wish, although it is adjacent to the den of a great mother gid, now in oestrus."

"We had best proceed directly to the south," said Cugel. "Well then, let us depart. Nothing is to be gained by delay."

The Busiaco maintained his stubborn crouch. "You have no other or more valuable object to offer?"

"Only my gratitude, in addition to the jeweled button."

"This must suffice," grumbled the Busiaco. "Let me examine the button, at least."

Cugel reluctantly brought forth the gem, which the Busiaco inspected, then tucked into a greasy pouch. "Come then." He motioned Cugel aboard the raft, cast off the rope and poled across the river. The water seemed extremely shallow, and the pole never descended more than a foot or two. Wading would have been simplicity itself, or so it seemed to Cugel. But the Busiaco, sensing the direction of Cugel's thoughts, said: "The river teems with glass reptiles. An unwary man, who dips so much as a toe into the water, is instantly attacked and devoured."

"Indeed!" said Cugel, drawing back from the edge of the raft.

"Indeed." The Busiaco grounded the raft on the opposite bank. Cugel jumped ashore, but the Busiaco made no motion to follow.

"Come," urged Cugel in a haughty voice, "we must yet traverse the forest!"

"To become victims to the erbs and grues? Hardly. I now, verbally, render my guidance: continue along the bank of the river until it debouches into the ocean. Follow the shore south, never entering the forest. Presently you will come to an inhabited region, where I suggest a permanent residence thus to avoid the Mountains of Magnatz." Raising his hand in a gesture of farewell, he thrust the raft back out upon the face of the river. His exertion was such that the pole broke; whereupon the Busiaco jumped into the water and pushed the raft across to the opposite bank.

"A rash man," muttered Cugel to himself, "thus to dare the ferocious attack of the glass reptiles!"

He hesitated a moment, then turned away and marched west along the riverbank, the edge of the forest close to his left hand. A hundred yards along he came upon an old but substantial stone bridge, spanning the river. Cugel

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stopped short, frowned thoughtfully, and turned to look back upstream. Had the Busiacos been aware of the bridge? It was hard to believe; still, how could creatures so gross and stupid hope to trick him, Cugel the Clever?

Cugel made a petulant gesture. He turned once more and set off beside the river, which presently poured across a bar of gray sand into the ocean. Skirting the shore Cugel proceeded at a smart pace to the south. The forest retreated to the east, the shore veered away to the west. Cugel continued south across the barren land which lay between. The sun crossed the sky and dropped into the west; just as it slanted behind the Mountains of Magnatz, he came to a rude settlement and a tavern at the crossroads. This latter was a bluff structure of gray stone roofed with black slates, with six round windows each fabricated of a hundred blue bull's-eyes. Pausing by the entrance, Cugel took stock of his resources, which were scant, consisting indeed of the single jeweled button remaining to him. He pushed through the door, into a long room hung with old bronze lamps. At a short buffet the publican poured grogs and punches to the three men who were his present customers. All turned to stare as Cugel entered the room.

The publican spoke politely enough. "Welcome, wanderer; what is your pleasure?"

"First a cup of wine, then supper and lodging for the night; finally, exact knowledge regarding the road south."

The publican set forth a cup of wine. "Supper and lodging in due course. The road leads into the realm of Magnatz, which is enough to know."

"Magnatz then is a creature of dread?"

The publican gave his head a dour shake. "Men have fared south never to return. No man in memory has approached from that direction. I can vouch only for so much."

The three men who sat drinking nodded in solemn corroboration. Two were peasants of the region, while the third wore the tall black boots of a professional witch-chaser. The first peasant signaled the publican, "Pour this unfortunate a cup of wine, at my expense."

Cugel accepted the cup with mixed feelings. "I drink with thanks, though I specifically disavow the appelation 'unfortunate' lest the force of the word project upon my destiny."

"As you will," responded the peasant, "though in these melancholy times, who is otherwise?" And for a space the peasants argued the repair of a stone fence which separated their lands.

"The work is arduous, but the advantages great," declared one.

"Agreed," stated the other, "but

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my luck is this: no sooner do we complete the task than the sun goes black, with all the toil for naught."

The first flourished his arms in derisive rejection of the argument. "This is a risk we must assume. Notice: I drink wine, though I may not live to become drunk. Does this deter me? No! I reject the future; I drink now, I become drunk as circumstances dictate."

The publican laughed and pounded the buffet with his fist. "You are as crafty as a Busiaco, of whom I hear there is an encampment nearby. Perhaps the wanderer met them?" and he looked questioningly at Cugel, who nodded.

"I encountered such a group: crass rather than crafty, in my opinion. In reference once more to the road south, can anyone here supply specific advice?"

The witch-chaser said gruffly, "I can: avoid it. You will first encounter deodands avid for your flesh. Beyond is the realm of Magnatz, beside whom the deodands appear as angels of mercy, if a tenth of the rumors are true."

"This is discouraging news," said Cugel. "Is there no other route to the lands of the south?"

"Indeed there is," said the witch-chaser, "and I recommend it. Return north along the trail to the Great Erm, and proceed eastward across the extent of the forest, which becomes ever denser and more dread. Needless to say, you will need a stout arm and feet with wings to escape the vampires, grues, erbs and leucomorphs. After penetrating to the remote edge of the forest you must swing south to the Vale of Dharad, where according to rumor an army of basilisks beseiges the ancient city Mar. Should you win past the raging battle, the Great Central Steppe lies beyond, where is neither food nor water and which is the haunt of the pelgrane. Crossing the steppe you turn your face back to the west, and now you wade a series of poisonous swamps. Beyond lies an area of which I know nothing except that it is named the Land of Evil Recollection. After crossing this region you will find yourself at a point to the south of the Mountains of Magnatz."

Cugel mused a moment or two. "The route which you delineate, while it may be safer and less taxing than the direct way south, seems of inordinate length. I am disposed to risk the Mountains of Magnatz!"

The first peasant inspected him with awe. "I surmise you to be a noted wizard, seething with spells."

Cugel gave his head a smiling shake. "I am Cugel the Clever; no more, no less. And now—wine!"

The landlord presently brought forth supper: a stew of lentils and land-crabs garnished with wild ramp and bilberries.

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After the meal the two peasants drank a final cup of wine and departed, while Cugel, the host and the witch-chaser sat before the fire discussing various aspects of existence. The witch-chaser finally arose to retire to his chamber. Before departing he approached Cugel, and spoke in a frank manner. "I have noticed your cloak, which is of quality rarely seen in this backward region. Since you are as good as dead, why do you not bestow this cloak upon me, who has need of it?"

Cugel tersely rejected the proposal and went to his own room.

During the night he was aroused by a scraping sound near the foot of his bed. Leaping to his feet he captured a person of no great stature. When hauled out into the light, the intruder proved to be the pot-boy, still clutching Cugel's shoes which he evidently had intended to purloin. "What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded Cugel, cuffing the lad. "Speak! How dare you attempt such an act!"

The pot-boy begged Cugel to desist. "What difference does it make? A doomed man needs no such elegant footwear!"

"I will be the judge of that," said Cugel. "Do you expect me to walk barefoot to my death in the Mountains of Magnatz? Be off with you!" And he sent the wretched lad sprawling down the hall.

In the morning at breakfast he spoke of the incident to the landlord, who showed no great interest. When it came time to settle his score, Cugel tossed the jeweled button upon the counter. "Fix, if you will, a fair value upon this gem, subtract the score and give me my change in gold coins."

The landlord examined the ornament, pursed his lips, cocked his head to the side. "The total of the charges to your account exactly equals the worth of this trinket: there is no change forthcoming."

"What!" stormed Cugel. "This clear aquamarine flanked by four emeralds? For a cup or two of poor wine, a porridge and sleep disturbed by the villainy of your pot-boy? Is this a tavern or a bandit lair?"

The landlord shrugged. "The charges are somewhat in excess of the usual fee, but money mouldering in the pockets of a corpse serves no one."

Cugel at last extracted several gold coins from the landlord together with a parcel of bread, cheese and wine. The landlord came to the door, pointed. "There is but a single trail, that leading south. The Mountains of Magnatz rise before you. Farewell."

Not without foreboding, Cugel set off to the south. For a space the trail led past the tillage of local peasants; then as the foothills bulked to either side, the trail became first a track, then a trace

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winding along a dry riverbed, beside thickets of prickle-bush, spurge, yarrow, asphodel. Along the crest of the hill paralleling the trail grew a tangle of stunted oak and Cugel, thinking to improve his chances for going unobserved, climbed to the ridge and continued in the shelter of the foliage.

The air was clear, the sky a brilliant dark blue. The sun wallowed up to the zenith and Cugel bethought himself of the food he carried in his pouch. He seated himself, but as he did so the motion of a skipping dark shadow caught his eye. His blood chilled. The creature surely meant to leap upon his back.

Cugel pretended not to notice, and presently the shadow moved forward again: a deodand, taller and heavier than himself, black as midnight except for shining white eyes, white teeth and claws, wearing straps of leather to support a green velvet shirt.

Cugel debated his best course of action. Face to face, chest to chest, the deodand would tear him to pieces. With his sword ready, Cugel might hack and stab and hold the creature at bay until its frenzy for blood overcame its fear of pain and it flung itself forward regardless of hurt. Possibly Cugel was more fleet, and might outdistance the creature, but only after a long and dogged pursuit . . . It slipped forward again, to stand behind a crumbling outcrop twenty paces down-slope from where Cugel sat. As soon as it had disappeared, Cugel ran to the outcrop, jumped to the top. Here he lifted a heavy stone and as the deodand came skulking below, threw it down upon the creature's back. It toppled to lie kicking, and Cugel jumped down to deliver the death-stroke. The deodand had pulled himself against the rock and hissed in horror at the sight of Cugel's naked blade. "Hold your stroke," it said. "You gain nothing by my death."

"Only the satisfaction of killing one who planned to devour me."

"A sterile pleasure!"

"Few pleasures are otherwise," said Cugel. "But while you live, inform me regarding the Mountains of Magnatz."

"They are as you see: stern mountains of ancient black rock."

"And what of Magnatz?"

"I have no knowledge of any such entity."

"What? The men to the north shudder at the very word!"

The deodand pulled himself slightly more erect. "This well may be. I have heard the name, and consider it no more than a legend of old."

"Why do travelers go south and none go north?"

"Why should anyone seek to travel north? As for those coming south, they have provided food for myself and my fellows." And the

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deodand inched himself up. Cugel picked up a great stone, held it aloft, dashed it down upon the black creature, which fell back, kicking feebly. Cugel picked up another stone.

"Hold!" called the deodand in a faint voice. "Spare me, and I will aid you to life."

"How is this?" asked Cugel.

"You seek to travel south; others like me inhabit caves along the way: how can you escape them unless I guide you by ways they do not frequent?"

"You can do this?"

"If you undertake to spare my life."

"Excellent. But I must take safeguards; in your lust for blood you might ignore the agreement."

"You have maimed me; what further security do you need?" cried the deodand. Cugel nevertheless bound the creature's arms and arranged a halter around the thick black neck.

In such fashion they proceeded, the deodand limping and hopping, and directing Cugel by a circuitous route above certain caves.

The mountains lifted higher; winds boomed and echoed down the stone canyons. Cugel continued to question the deodand regarding Magnatz, but elicited only the opinion that Magnatz was a creature of fable.

At last they came to a sandy flat high above the lowlands, which the deodand declared beyond the zone of his particular sept.

"What lies beyond?" asked Cugel.

"I have no knowledge; this is the limit of my wandering. Now release me and go your way, and I will return to my people."

Cugel shook his head. "Night is not too far distant. What is to prevent you from following to attack me once again? Best that I kill you."

The deodand laughed sadly. "Three others follow us. They have kept their distance only because I waved them back. Kill me and you will never wake to see the morning sun."

"We will travel further together," said Cugel.

"As you wish."

Cugel led the way south, the deodand limping to the rear. The valley became a chasm floored with giant boulders, and looking back Cugel saw black shapes moving among the shadows. The deodand grinned meaningfully at Cugel. "You would do well to halt at once; why wait until dark? Death comes with less horror while the light shines."

Cugel made no response, but pressed forward with all speed. The trail left the valley, climbed to a high meadow where the air blew cool. Larch, kaobab and balm-cedar grew to either side, and a stream ran among grasses

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and herbs. The deodand began to evince uneasiness, jerking at its halter, limping with exaggerated debility. Cugel could see no reason for the display: the countryside, except for the presence of the deodands, seemed without threat. Cugel became impatient. "Why do you delay? I hope to find a mountain hospice before the coming of dark. Your lagging and limping discommode me."

"You should have considered this before you maimed me with a rock," said the deodand. "After all, I do not accompany you of my own choice."

Cugel looked behind. The three deodands who previously had skulked among the rocks now followed quite casually. "You have no control over the grisly appetites of your fellows?" he demanded.

"I have no control over my own," responded the deodand. "Only the fact of my broken limbs prevents me from leaping at your throat."

"Do you wish to live?" asked Cugel, putting his hand significantly to sword-hilt.

"To a certain extent, though with not so fervent a yearning as do true men."

"If you value life even an iota, order your fellows to turn back, to give over their sinister pursuit."

"It would be a futile exercise. And in any event what is life to you? Look, before you tower the Mountains of Magnatz!"

"Ha!" muttered Cugel. "Did you not claim the repute of the region to be purely fabulous?"

"Exactly; but I did not enlarge upon the nature of the fable."

As they spoke there came a swift sigh in the air; looking about Cugel saw that the three deodands had fallen, transfixed by arrows. From a nearby grove stepped four young men in brown hunting costume. They were of a fair, fresh complexion, brown hair, good stature, and seemed of good disposition. The foremost called out, "How is it that you come from the uninhabited north? And why do you walk with this dire creature of the night?"

"There is no mystery to either of your questions," said Cugel. "First, the north is not uninhabited; some hundreds of men yet remain alive. As to this black hybrid of demon and cannibal, I employed it to lead me safely through the mountains, but I am dissatisfied with its services."

"I did all expected of me," declared the deodand. "Release me in accordance with our pact."

"As you will," said Cugel. He released the halter which secured the creature's throat, and it limped away glaring over its shoulder. Cugel made a sign to the leader of the huntsmen; he spoke a word to his fellows; they raised their bows and shot the deodand with arrows.

Cugel gave a curt nod of ap-

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proval. "What of yourselves? And what of Magnatz who reputedly makes the mountains unsafe for travel?"

The huntsmen laughed. "A legend merely. At one time a terrible creature named Magnatz did indeed exist, and in deference to the tradition we of Vull Village still appoint one of our number to serve as Watchman. But this is all the credit to be given the tale."

"Strange," said Cugel, "that the tradition wields so wide an influence."

The huntsmen shrugged indifferently. "Night approaches; it is time to turn back. You are welcome to join us, and at Vull there is a tavern where you may rest."

"I gladly avail myself of your company." The group set off up the trail. As they marched Cugel made inquiry regarding the road to the south, but the huntsmen were of little assistance. "Vull Village is situated on the shores of Lake Vull, which is unnavigable for its whirlpools, and few of us have explored the mountains to the south. It is said that they are barren and drop off into an inhospitable gray waste."

"Possibly Magnatz roams the mountains across the lake?" inquired Cugel delicately.

"Tradition is silent on this score," replied the huntsmen.

After an hour's march the group reached Vull, a village of an affluence surprising to Cugel. The dwellings were solidly constructed of stone and timber, the streets were neatly laid-out and well-drained; there was a public market, a granary, a hall, a repository, several taverns, a number of modestly luxurious mansions. As the huntsmen marched up the main street, a man called out to them. "Important news! The Watchman has perished!"

"Indeed?" inquired the leader of the huntsmen with keen interest. "Who serves in the interim?"

"It is Lafel, son to the hetman: who else?"

"Who else indeed?" remarked the huntsman.

"Is the post of Watchman held in such high esteem then?" asked Cugel.

The huntsman shrugged. "It is best described as a ceremonial sinecure. A permanent functionary will no doubt be chosen tomorrow. But notice in the door of the hall!" And he pointed to a stocky broad-shouldered man wearing brown fur-trimmed robes and a black bifold hat. "That is Hylam Wiskode, the hetman himself. Ho, Wiskode! We have encountered a traveler from the north!"

Hylam Wiskode approached, and saluted Cugel with courtesy. "Welcome! Strangers are a novelty; our hospitality is yours!"

"I thank you indeed," said Cugel. "I had expected no such affability in the Mountains of Mag-

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natz, which all the world holds in dread."

The hetman chuckled. "Misapprehensions are common everywhere; you may well find certain of our notions quaint and archaic, like our Watch for Magnatz. But come! here is our best tavern. After you have established yourself we will sup."

Cugel was taken to a comfortable chamber, furnished various conveniences, and presently, clean and refreshed, he rejoined Hylam Wiskode in the common room. An appetizing supper was set before him, together with a flagon of wine.

After the meal the hetman conducted Cugel on a tour of the town, which enjoyed a pleasant aspect above the lake.

Tonight seemed to be a special occasion: everywhere cressets threw up plumes of flame, while the folk of Vull walked the streets, pausing to confer in small knots and groups. Cugel inquired the reason for the obvious perturbation. "Is it because your Watchman has died?"

"This is the case," said the hetman. "We treat our traditions with all earnestness, and the selection of a new Watchman is a matter for public debate. But observe: here is the public repository, where the common wealth is collected. Do you care to look within?"

"I abide your pleasure," said Cugel. "If you wish to inspect the communal gold, I will be glad to join you."

The hetman threw back the door. "Here is much more than gold! In this bin are jewels; that rack holds antique coins. Those bales contain fine silks and embroidered damask; to the side are cases of precious spice, even more precious liquors, and subtle pastes without value. But I should not use these terms to you, a traveler and man of experience, who has looked upon real wealth."

Cugel insisted that the riches of Vull were by no means to be deprecated. The hetman bowed appreciatively and they proceeded to an esplanade beside the lake, now a great dark expanse illuminated by feeble starlight.

The hetman indicated a cupola supported five hundred feet in the air by a slender pillar. "Can you guess the function of that structure?"

"It would seem to be the post of the Watchman," said Cugel.

"Correct! You are a man of discernment. A pity you are in such haste and can not linger in Vull!"

Cugel, considering his empty wallet and the riches of the storehouse, made a suave gesture. "I would not be averse to such a sojourn, but in all candor, I travel in penury, and would be forced to seek some sort of gainful employment. I wonder regarding the office of Watchman, which I under-

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stand to be a post of some prestige."

"Indeed it is," said the hetman. "My own son stands watch tonight. Still, there is no reason why you should not be a suitable candidate for the position. The duties are by no means arduous; indeed the post is something of a sinecure."

Cugel became conscious of Firx's fretful stirrings. "And as to the emoluments?"

"They are excellent. The Watchman enjoys great prestige here in Vull, since, in a purely formal sense, he protects us all from danger."

"They are, specifically, what?"

The hetman paused to reflect, and ticked off the points on his finger. "First, he is provided a comfortable watch-tower, complete with cushions, an optical device whereby distant objects are made to seem close at hand, a brazier to provide heat and an ingenious communications system. Next, his food and drink are of the highest quality and provided free of charge, at his pleasure and to his order. Next, he is generally granted the subsidiary title 'Guardian of the Public Repository', and to simplify matters, he is invested with full title to, and powers of dispensation over, the total wealth of Vull. Fourth, he may select as his spouse that maiden who seems to him the most attractive. Fifthly, he is accorded the title of 'Baron' and must be saluted with profound respect."

"Indeed, indeed," said Cugel. "The position appears worthy of consideration. What responsibilities are entailed?"

"They are as the nomenclature implies. The Watchman must keep watch, for this is one of the old-fashioned customs we observe. The duties are hardly onerous, but they must not be scamped, because that would signify farce, and we are serious folk, even in connection with our quaint traditions."

Cugel nodded judiciously. "The conditions are straightforward. The Watchman watches; nothing could be more clearly expressed. But who is Magnatz, in what direction should he be apprehended, and how may he be recognized?"

"These questions are of no great application," said the hetman, "since the creature, in theory, has no existence."

Cugel glanced up at the tower, across the lake, back toward the public repository. "I hereby make application for the position, providing all is as you state."

Firx instantly impinged a series of racking pangs upon Cugel's vitals. Cugel bent double, clasped his abdomen, straightened, and making excuses to the perplexed hetman, moved to the side. "Patience!" he implored Firx. "Temperance! Have you no concept of realities? My purse is empty; there

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are long leagues ahead! To travel with any degree of expedition, I must restore my strength and replenish my wallet. I plan to work at this office only long enough to do both, then it is post-haste to Almery!"

Firx reluctantly diminished the demonstrations, and Cugel returned to where the hetman waited.

"All is as before," said Cugel. "I have taken counsel with myself and believe I can adequately fulfil the obligations of the job."

The hetman nodded. "I am pleased to hear this. You will find my presentation of the facts to be accurate in every essential aspect. I likewise have been reflecting, and I can safely say that no other person of the town aspires to so august a position, and I hereby pronounce you Watchman of the Town!" Ceremoniously the hetman brought forth a golden collar, which he draped around Cugel's neck.

They returned toward the tavern, and as they went, the folk of Vull, noting the golden collar, pressed upon the hetman with eager questions. "Yes," was his answer. "This gentleman has demonstrated his capabilities, and I have pronounced him Watchman of the Town!"

At the news the folk of Vull became generously expansive, and congratulated Cugel as if he had been a resident the whole of his life.

All repaired to the tavern; wine and spiced meat were set out; pipers appared and there was decorous dancing and merry-making.

During the course of the evening Cugel spied an extremely beautiful girl dancing with a young man who had been part of the hunting party. Cugel nudged the hetman, directed his attention to the girl.

"Ah yes: the delightful Marlinka! She dances with the lad whom I believe she plans to espouse."

"Her plans possibly are subject to alteration?" inquired Cugel.

The hetman winked slyly. "You find her attractive?"

"Indeed, and since this is a perquisite of my office, I hereby declare this delightful creature my bride-elect. Let the ceremonies be performed at once!"

"So swiftly?" inquired the hetman. "Ah well, the hot blood of youth brooks no delay." He signaled the girl and she danced merrily over to the table. Cugel arose, performed a deep bow. The hetman spoke. "Marlinka, the Watchman of the Town finds you desirable and wishes you for his spouse."

Marlinka seemed first surprised, then amused. She glanced roguishly at Cugel, and performed an arch curtsey. "The Watchman does me great honor."

"Further," intoned the hetman, "he requires that the marital ceremonies be performed on the instant."

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Marlinka looked dubiously at Cugel, then over her shoulder at the young man with whom she had been dancing. "Very well," she said. "As you will."

The ceremony was performed, and Cugel found himself espoused to Marlinka, whom, on closer examination, he saw to be a creature of delightful animation, charming manners and exquisite appearance. He put his arm around her waist. "Come," he whispered, "let us slip away for a period and solemnize the connubiality."

"Not so soon," whispered Marlinka. "I must have time to order myself; I am over-excited!" She released herself, and danced away.

There was further feasting and merry-making, and to his vast displeasure Cugel noted Marlinka again dancing with the youth to whom she formerly had been betrothed. As he watched she embraced this young man with every evidence of ardor. Cugel marched forward, halted the dance, took his bride aside. "Such an act is hardly appropriate; you have only been married an hour!"

Marlinka, both surprised and non-plussed, laughed, then frowned, then laughed again and promised to behave with greater decorum. Cugel attempted to lead her to his chamber, but she once again declared the moment unsuitable.

Cugel drew a deep sigh of vexation, but was consoled by the recollection of his other perquisites: the freedom of the repository, for instance. He leaned over to the hetman. "Since now I am titular guardian to the public repository, it is only prudent that I acquaint myself in detail with the treasure I am charged with guarding. If you will be so good as to turn over the keys, I will go to make a quick inventory."

"Even better," said the hetman, "I will accompany you, and do what I can in the way of assistance."

They crossed to the repository. The hetman unlocked the door and held a light. Cugel entered, examined the valuables. "I see that all is in order, and perhaps it is advisable to wait till my head is settled before undertaking a detailed inventory. But in the meantime—" Cugel went to the jewel bin, selected several gems, and began to tuck them into his pouch.

"A moment," said the hetman. "I fear you inconvenience yourself. Shortly you will be fitted with garments of rich cloth deserving of your rank. The wealth is most conveniently kept here in the treasury; why trouble yourself with the weight, or incur the possibility of loss?"

"There is something in what you say," remarked Cugel, "but I wish to order the construction of a mansion overlooking the lake and I will need wealth to pay the costs of construction."

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"In due time, in due time. The actual work can hardly commence until you have examined the countryside and chosen the most felicitous site."

"True," agreed Cugel. "I can see that there are busy times ahead. But now—back to the tavern! My spouse is over-modest and now I will brook no further delay!"

But upon their return Marlinka was nowhere to be found. "Doubtless she has gone to array herself in seductive garments," suggested the hetman. "Have patience!"

Cugel compressed his lips in displeasure, and was further annoyed to find that the young huntsman had likewise departed.

The merry-making waxed apace, and after many toasts, Cugel became a trifle fuddled, and was carried up to his chamber.

Early in the morning the hetman rapped at the door, and entered at Cugel's summons. "We must now visit the watch-tower," said the hetman. "My own son guarded Vull this last night, since our tradition demands incessant vigilance."

With poor grace Cugel dressed himself and followed the hetman out into the cool air of morning. They walked to the watch-tower, and Cugel was astounded both by its height and by the elegant simplicity of its construction, the slender stem rearing five hundred feet into the air to support the cupola.

A rope ladder was the only means of ascent. The hetman started up and Cugel came below, the ladder swaying and jiggling in such a fashion as to cause Cugel vertigo.

They gained the cupola in safety and the hetman's weary son descended. The cupola was furnished in rather less luxury than Cugel had expected, and indeed seemed almost austere. He pointed out this fact to the hetman, who stated that the deficiencies were readily repaired. "Merely state your requirements: they shall be met!"

"Well then: I will want a heavy rug for the floor—tones of green and gold might be the most felicitous. I require a more elegant couch, of greater scope than that disreputable pallet I see against the wall, as my spouse Marlinka will be spending much of her time here. A cabinet for gems and valuables there, a compartment for sweetmeats there, a tray for perfumed essences there. At this location I will require a taboret with provision for chilling wines."

The hetman assented readily to all. "It shall be as you say. But now we must discuss your duties, which are so simple as almost to require no elaboration: you must keep watch for Magnatz."

"This I understand, but as before a corollary thought occurs to me: in order to work at optimum efficiency I should know what or whom I am to watch for. Magnatz might stalk unhindered along the

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esplanade were I unable to recognize him. What then is his semblance?"

The hetman shook his head. "I cannot say; the information is lost in the fog of ages. The legend reports only that he was tricked and baffled by a sorcerer, and taken away." The hetman went to the observation port. "Notice: here is an optical device. Working by an ingenious principle, it bloats and augments those scenes toward which you direct it. From time to time you may choose to inspect landmarks of the area. Yonder is Mount Temus; below is Lake Vull where no one can sail for vortices and whirlpools. In this direction is Padagar Pass, leading eastward into the land of Merce. You can barely discern that commemorative cairn decreed by Guzpah the Great when he brought eight armies to attack Magnatz. Magnatz erected another cairn—see that great mound to the north?—in order to cover their mangled corpses. And there is the notch Magnatz broke through the mountains that cooling air might circulate through the valley. Across the lake lie certain titanic ruins, where Magnatz had his palace."

Cugel inspected the various landmarks through the optical device. "Magnatz was by all accounts a creature of vast potency."

"So the legends assert. Now, a final matter. If Magnatz appears—a laughable whimsy, of course—you must pull this rod, which rings the great gong. Our laws stringently forbid ringing the gong, except at the sight of Magnatz. The penalty for such a crime is intensely severe; in fact, the last Watchman betrayed his high office by wantonly ringing the gong. Needless to say, he was judged harshly, and after he had been torn to bits by a criss-cross of chains, his fragments were cast into a whirlpool."

"What an idiotic fellow!" remarked Cugel. "Why forfeit so much wealth, good cheer and honor for a footling amusement?"

"We are all of like opinion," stated the hetman.

Cugel frowned. "I am puzzled by his act. Was he a young man, to yield so readily to a frivolous whim?"

"Not even this plea can be made in his behalf. He was a sage of four-score years, three-score of which he had served the town as Watchman."

"His conduct becomes all the more incredible," was Cugel's wondering comment.

"All of Vull feel the same." The hetman rubbed his hands briskly. "I believe that we have discussed all the essentials; I will now depart and leave you to the enjoyment of your duties."

"One moment," said Cugel. "I insist upon certain alterations and improvements: the rug, the cabinet, the cushions, the tray, the couch."

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"Of course," said the hetman. He bent his head over the rail, shouted instructions to those below. There was no instant response, and the hetman became exasperated. "What a nuisance!" he exclaimed. "It appears I must see to the matter myself." He began to climb down the rope ladder. Cugel called after him, "Be good enough to send up my spouse Marlinka, as there are certain matters I wish to take up with her."

"I shall seek her out at once," called the hetman over his shoulder.

Several minutes later there was a creaking of the great pulley; the ladder was lowered at the end of the rope which supported it. Looking over the side Cugel saw that the cushions were about to be raised. The heavy rope supporting the ladder rattled through the pulley, bringing up a light line—hardly more than a stout cord—and on this cord the cushions were raised. Cugel inspected them with disapproval; they were old and dusty, and not at all of the quality he had envisoned. Most certainly he would insist upon furnishings superior to this! Possibly the hetman intended these merely as a stop-gap until cushions of the requisite elegance could be provided. Cugel nodded: this was obviously the situation.

He looked around the horizon. Magnatz was nowhere to be seen. He swung his arms once or twice, paced back and forth, went to look down at the plaza, where he expected to find artisans assembling the appurtenances he had ordered. But there was no such activity; the towns-people appeared to be going about their usual affairs. Cugel shrugged, went to make another inspection of the horizon. As before, Magnatz was invisible.

Once more he surveyed the plaza. He frowned, squinted: was that his spouse Marlinka walking past in the company of a young man? He focused the optical device upon the supple shape: it was Marlinka indeed, and the young man who clasped her elbow with insolent intimacy was the huntsman to whom she had at one time been affianced. Cugel clamped his jaw in outrage. This sort of behaviour could not continue! When Marlinka presented herself, he would speak emphatically upon the subject.

The sun reached zenith; the cord quivered. Looking over the side Cugel saw that his noon repast was being hoisted in a basket, and he clapped his hands in anticipation. But the basket, when he lifted the cloth, contained only a half-loaf of bread, a chunk of tough meat, a flask of thin wine. Cugel stared at the sorry fare in shock, and decided to descend on the moment to set matters straight. He cleared his throat, called down for the ladder. No one appeared to hear him. He called more loudly. One or two of

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the folk looked up in mild curiosity, and passed on about their business. Cugel jerked angrily at the cord, hauled it over the pulley, but no heavy rope appeared nor a rope ladder. The light line was an endless loop, capable of supporting approximately the weight of a basket of food.

Thoughtfully Cugel sat back, and assessed the situation. Then directing the optical device once more upon the plaza he searched for the hetman, the one man to whom he might turn for satisfaction.

Late in the afternoon, Cugel chanced to observe the door to the tavern, just as the hetman came staggering forth, obviously much elevated by wine. Cugel called peremptorily down; the hetman stopped short, looked about for the source of the voice, shook his head in perplexity, continued across the plaza.

The sun slanted across Lake Vull; the whirlpools were spirals of maroon and black. Cugel's supper arrived: a dish of boiled leeks and a bowl of porridge. He inspected it with small interest, then went to the side of the cupola. "Send up the ladder!" he called. "Darkness comes! In the absence of light, it is futile to watch for Magnatz!"

As before his remarks passed unheeded. Firx suddenly seemed to take cognizance of the situation and visited several sharp twinges upon Cugel's vitals.

Cugel passed a fitful night. As merry-makers left the tavern Cugel called to them and made representations regarding his plight, but he might as well have saved his breath.

The sun appeared over the mountains. Cugel's morning meal was of fair quality, but by no means up to the standard described by Hylam Wiskode, the double-tongued hetman of Vull. In a rage, Cugel bellowed orders to those below, but was ignored. He drew a deep breath: it seemed then that he was cast upon his own resources. But what of this? Was he Cugel the Clever for nothing? And he considered various means for descending the tower. The line by which his food ascended was far too light. If doubled and redoubled so that it bore his weight, it would yield, at most, a quarter of the distance to the ground. His clothes and leathers, if torn and knotted, might provide another twenty feet, leaving him dangling in mid-air. The stem of the tower provided no foothold. With appropriate tools and sufficient time he might be able to chisel a staircase down the outside of the tower, or even chip away the tower in its entirety, eventually reducing it to a short stump from which he might leap to earth . . . The project was not feasible. Cugel slumped on the cushions in despair. Everything was now clear. He had been fooled. He was a prisoner. How long had

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the previous Watchman remained at his post? Sixty years? The prospect was by no means cheerful.

Firx, of like opinion, jabbed furiously with barb and prong, adding to Cugel's woes.

So passed days and nights. Cugel brooded long and darkly, and contemplated the folk of Vull with great revulsion. On occasion he considered ringing the great gong, as his predecessor had been driven to do, but recalling the penalty, he restrained himself.

Cugel became familiar with every aspect of town, lake and landscape. In the morning heavy mists covered the lake; after two hours a breeze thrust them aside. The whirlpools sucked and groaned, swinging here and there, and the fishermen of Vull ventured hardly more than the length of their boats off-shore. Cugel grew to recognize all the villagers, and learned the personal habits of each. Marlinka, his perfidious spouse, crossed the plaza often, but seldom if ever thought to turn her glance upward. Cugel marked well the cottage where she lived and gave it constant surveillance through the optical device. If she dallied with the young huntsman, her discretion was remarkable, and Cugel's dark suspicions were never documented.

The food failed to improve in quality and not infrequently was forgotten altogether. Firx was persistently acrimonious, and Cugel paced the confines of the cupola with ever more frantic strides. Shortly after sundown, after a particularly agonizing admonishment by Firx, Cugel stopped short in his tracks. To descend the tower was a matter of simplicity! Why had he delayed so long? Cugel the Clever indeed!

He ripped into strips every fragment of cloth the cupola provided, and from the yield plaited a rope twenty feet long. Now he must wait till the town grew quiet: yet an hour or two.

Firx assailed him once more, and Cugel cried out. "Peace, scorpion, tonight we escape this turret! Your acts are redundant!"

Firx gave over his demonstration, and Cugel went to investigate the plaza. The night was cool and misty: ideal for his purposes, and the folk of Vull were early to bed.

Cugel cautiously raised the line on which his food was hoisted; doubled, redoubled and redoubled it again and so produced a cable amply strong to support him. He tied a loop on one end, made the other fast to the pulley. After one last look around the horizon, he lowered himself over the side. He descended to the end of the cable, thrust himself into the loop and sat swaying some four hundred feet above the plaza. To one end of his twenty-foot rope he tied his shoe for a weight, and after several casts, flung a loop around the stem

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of the column, and pulled himself close. With infinite caution he slipped himself free and using the loop around the column as a brake, slid slowly to the ground. He took himself quickly into the shadows and donned his shoes. Just as he rose to his feet the door to the tavern swung open and out reeled Hylam Wiskode, much the worse for drunk. Cugel grinned unpleasantly and followed the staggering hetman into a side-street.

A single blow on the back of the head was enough; the hetman toppled into a ditch. Cugel was instantly upon him, and with deft fingers took his keys. Going now to the public repository he opened the door, slipped inside and filled a sack with gems, coins, flasks of costly essences, relics, and the like.

Returning to the street Cugel carried the sack to a dock beside the lake, where he hid it under a net. Now he proceeded to the cottage of his spouse Marlinka. Prowling beside the walls, he came to an open window, and stepping through found himself in her chamber.

She was awakened by his hands on her throat. When she tried to scream he cut off her wind. "It is I," he hissed, "Cugel, your spouse! Arise and come with me. Your first sound will be your last!"

In great terror, the girl obeyed. At Cugel's order she threw a cloak about her shoulders and clasped sandals upon her feet. "Where are we going?" she whispered in a tremulous voice.

"No matter. Come now—through the window. Make not a sound!"

Standing outside in the dark Marlinka cast a horror-stricken glance toward the tower. "Who is on watch? Who guards Vull from Magnatz?"

"No one is on watch," said Cugel. "The tower is empty!"

Her knees gave way; she sagged to the ground. "Up!" said Cugel "Up! We must proceed!"

"But no one is on watch! This voids the spell the sorcerer cast upon Magnatz, who swore to return when vigilance ceased!"

Cugel lifted the girl to her feet. "This is no concern of mine; I disclaim responsibility. Did you not seek to fool and victimize me? Where were my cushions? Where was the fine food? And my spouse —where were you?"

The girl wept into her hands, and Cugel led her to the dock. He pulled close a fiserman's boat, ordered her aboard, threw in his loot.

Untying the boat, he shipped oars and rowed out upon the lake. Marlinka was aghast. "The whirlpools will drown us! Have you lost your reason?"

"Not at all! I have studied the whirlpools with care and know precisely the range of each."

Out upon the face of the lake moved Cugel, counting each stroke of his oars, and watching the stars.

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"Two hundred paces east . . . A hundred paces north . . . Two hundred paces east . . ."

So Cugel rowed while to right and left of them sounded the suck of whirling water. But the mist had gathered to blot out the stars and Cugel was forced to throw out the anchor. "This is well enough," he said. "We are safe now, and there is much that lies between us."

The girl shrank to her end of the boat. Cugel stepped astern and joined her. "Here I am, your spouse! Are you not overjoyed that finally we are alone? My chamber at the inn was far more comfortable, but this boat will suffice."

"No," she whimpered. "Do not touch me! The ceremony was meaningless, a trick to persuade you to serve as Watchman."

"For three-score years perhaps, until I rang the gong from utter desperation?"

"It is not my doing! I am guilty only of merriment! But what will become of Vull? No one watches, and the spell is broken!"

"So much the worse for the faithless folk of Vull! They have lost their treasure, their most beautiful maiden, and when day breaks Magnatz will march upon them."

Marlinka uttered a poignant cry, which was muffled in the mist. "Never speak the cursed name!"

"Why not? I shall shout it across the water! I will inform Magnatz that the spell is gone, that now he may come for his revenge!"

"No, no, indeed not!"

"Then you must behave toward me as I expect."

Weeping the girl obeyed, and at last a wan red light filtering through the mist signaled dawn. Cugel stood up in the boat, but all landmarks were yet concealed.

Another hour passed; the sun was now aloft. The folk of Vull would discover that their Watchman was gone, and with him their treasure. Cugel chuckled, and now a breeze lifted the mists, revealing the landmarks he had memorized. He leapt to the bow, hauled on the anchor line, but to his annoyance the anchor had fouled itself.

He jerked, strained, and the line gave a trifle. Cugel pulled with all his strength. From below came a great bubbling. "A whirlpool!" cried Marlinka in terror.

"No whirlpool here," panted Cugel, and jerked once more. The line seemed to relax and Cugel hauled in the rope. Looking over the side he found himself staring into an enormous pale face. The anchor had caught in a nostril. As he looked the eyes blinked open.

Cugel threw away the line, leapt for the oars, frantically rowed for the southern shore.

A hand as large as a house raised from the water, groped. Marlinka screamed. There was a great turbulence, a prodigious surge of water which flung the boat toward the shore like a chip, and Magnatz sat up in the center of Lake Vull.

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From the village came the sound of the warning gong, a frenzied clanging.

Magnatz heaved himself to his knees, water and muck draining from his vast body. The anchor which had pierced his nostril still hung in place, and a thick black fluid issued from the wound. He raised a great arm, slapped petulantly at the boat. The impact threw up a wall of foam which engulfed the boat, spilled treasure, sent Cugel and the girl toppling through the dark depths of the lake.

Cugel kicked and thrust, and propelled himself to the seething surface. Magnatz had gained his feet and was looking toward Vull.

Cugel swam to the beach, staggered ashore. Marlinka had drowned, and was nowhere to be seen. Across the lake Magnatz was wading slowly toward the village.

Cugel waited no longer. He turned and ran with all speed up the mountainside.

COMING NEXT MONTH

Zenna Henderson has told us many stories about the People—about the destruction of their spaceship and their scattered landings in Earth early in this century. Most of her stories have dealt with the reunions among the present generations of the scattered families as the People have gradually found each other once more.

In ANGELS UNAWARES, she takes us back, back to the first generation that landed . . .

It was when Gail and Nils brought their wagon through Millman's Pass that they found the burned homestead—and the bodies of four people who had been burned with it. But they also found and adopted the strange child they named Marnie—a young girl whose hair was singed and clothing seared, and who could not speak their language, but who floated over the ground when her feet grew sore.

Marnie was of the People, the only survivor, now, from her lifeship; her family was dead.

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A recent news item told about a literary award given to the best fiction by an inmate of a British prison. The convicts submitted, the judges read, pondered, awarded (£25), the book was published in England—and turned out to be an almost word-for-word plagiarism of a little-known American novel. Well, we knew all along about those new tricks by old dogs, and now we know about convicts. In the clever story below, Doris Buck directs our suspicious eye toward the eternal woman.

GIRLS WILL BE GIRLS

by Doris Pitkin Buck

"THAT'S THE PRICE WE HAVE TO pay—mental blockout." Fina spoke wearily. "If a man walked under our window now, I wouldn't know what he was up to. If I guessed, I'd guess wrong."

For a moment the room the girls shared grew silent.

Elsie weighed Fina's remark. "Well, who could know for certain? But it's always safe to assume the worst."

"I used to believe in men," Peg said, "before I came to Washington."

Several pairs of eyebrows lifted.

"I did, so help me. I'd drop this extrasensory work right now and try to go back to believing in them, if the Government didn't need us so much."

"And then," Fina said nastily, "there's the question of pay. Espers don't start in as GS 7's, on a GS 7's salary.

"Also there's a good chance of unscheduled in-grade raises if AFESPA likes our work." Elsie's smile was a trifle smug. Elsie was definitely the most gifted student trainee in the Armed Forces Extrasensory Perception Auxiliary; the venerable Professor Thurmond, up from Duke to evaluate tests, had told her so, patting her slim shoulder. She knew it was fatherly. She

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accepted it without embroidering it into anything else.

Mattie, the youngest and last trainee, listened. She listened every evening. Chilly prickles crystallized along her spine at what she heard. Surely a few men were decent. She thought of the boys she knew in Chillicothe, Ohio. They were good guys. Maybe along Pennsylvania Avenue, maybe in a backwater like O Street, you ran into disgusting types. Some men made a girl reach for the police whistle hanging unobtrusively under the front of her blouse if they put what they thought into action —implementing their intentions, as the Department of State would put it. No! Men weren't all bad. As soon as she went out for her first practice walk alone—making linkages, concentrating on elementary probing that might some day disclose an enemy spy—she intended to come back with a vindication of men. Mattie straightened. In her open mind she said, *I here highly resolve—*

"Look at that posture," Fina broke in. "But it's no wonder you're full of ginger, is it, pet? Sitting in a lovely cool study in Langley Forest all day, doing nothing but figure out whether a card another trainee turned up in San Francisco said *Moscow* or *maple leaf.*"

"It was a silhouette of a jet and—"

"Oh baby, so literal!" Elsie touched Mattie's smooth brown braids with enamelled fingertips. She added, "I've got to change my nail decor. You ought to have seen the mental leers my personalized finger nails got. Every chick girl has her initials stencilled over her Rose Dawn."

"Nail decor my great-aunt's foot! I went out day before yesterday with plain pink nails. I felt conspicuously anonymous." Peg snorted daintily. "I almost labeled myself, *espionage agent.* I passed a grandfather type, sweet pink cheeks, wavy silver hair—elderly boy doll. And what did the old goat think? *Want to hold that hand. Her elbows—pussycat curves.* He licked his lips. In a second he would have drooled. Thank heaven a fire engine distracted the old bastard!"

"Your arm isn't that pretty," Fina remarked judicially.

Peg's blonde curls bristled. "I am simply reporting what went through that s.o.b.'s mind. The next man was a sadist."

"We heard that on Tuesday," Fina objected. "And he was only sub-vicious really. You should have seen the heavy-set guy who fingered my page bob. Yanked it farther back with each thought. Some men go almost crazy over heavy hair, especially if it's sleek and black. It does things to them." She shuddered. She dropped her voice. "I had to turn into the renovated Statler-Hilton. Someone I knew had a room there. That was my salvation.

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I raced, absolutely raced across the lobby. Everyone stared. I didn't mind. I got to the elevator before he did. I know elevators are old-fashioned but they have doors." Fina drew a long breath. "I'm going to cut my hair short."

"It's undressing a woman that I mind most," Elsie complained. Her eyelids drooped in exhaustion. "Again, and again, and again—man after man looking through my clothes."

"You must have wished you'd sunburned differently. Your back got absolutely weird at the beach. It was that Italian hat with the holes," Fina and Peg gurgled as one.

Elsie spoke loftily. "They all saw me as an exquisite, crushable pink."

"All of them?" Mattie wailed feebly.

"Stop frightening our little girl." Fina spoke with authority. "She makes her first solo tomorrow. What's your beat, sweetie?"

"The Mall."

"A good place to start. Lots of kids play there with their minds on nothing but toy balloons."

"Oh I hope so." Mattie really thought she meant it.

The Mall held a scattering of old men on benches. Mattie passed slowly, noting with her outer as well as her inner eye how they read dropped newspapers and wondered about the miracle cure for leukemia so successful on laboratory rats and rabbits. They wondered about the new old-age legislation with bonuses every five years for those over eighty. Senator Millard of Arkansas wanted bonuses to begin at sixty. "Routine," Mattie jotted in a small book. She could have put *dull*, but that sounded less than professional. She could have guessed without ESP training. Now and then the oldsters looked at her in a faroff way. She had hoped that at least one had his mind on sedition and the destruction of the American way of life. So thrilling for her first report after the walk was over! But such beginner's luck was rare.

A splendidly set up man in his thirties came striding. Thoughts positively shot out of him toward her. *Wish she weren't in my way. Late. Mall's crowded for 10:30. I'm*—He passed. But *late, late, late* drifted back. His brain currents had power.

Somebody older walked by, his heels taking his irritation out on the pavement. *Rocket pilots on strike. Damn! Amalgamated Grids off fifteen points. Damn! The Dow dropping to 1060. Damn!* He brushed against Mattie, almost stepping on her. The atmosphere continued to crackle while he almost stepped on the next person.

Mattie caught her breath when she sighted Bob Murcheson. He frequently made trips to Chillicothe to see his grandmother. Mat-

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tie stood in awe of him. She knew he called headwaiters by name when he took his grandmother out. She tried to look anywhere else. She was not supposed to speak to people when on duty. She turned her head right. She turned her head left. She tried to backtrack. He came straight up to her.

"Of all things. And they told me you were in Guatemala."

Mattie almost blurted out that false backgrounds were invented for Espers. She stopped in time. *He's lonely,* she told herself, with surprise. She'd thought of Bob as beyond the kind of feeling she had.

"Do you happen to be free for lunch? Is this my lucky day?"

She flushed. *He sees I'm grown up. He's looking just at me. He thought I'd grown up to be—not nearly so pretty.*

"Lunch." She almost choked with embarrassment. *Bob asking her to lunch. Bob, who knew headwaiters by name.* "Lunch," she repeated. *Moron. Idiot. Say yes,* hammered through Mattie's head. "No. I couldn't, I'm—I'm sorry."

She had bitten off more virtue than she could chew. "Or maybe it's tomorrow that's full." She flipped through her record book. "Why, why yes, I am free today."

After a leisurely lunch at Chez Gaspard, where they had a table by a window, Mattie and Bob parted. She had just enough sense not to give him her telephone number.

When Bob tipped his hat, the way he did it made Mattie feel as if the youngest son of a duke were paying her compliments. *Sweet girl. Could be my little sister. Like Gertrude. Pretty mouth. Like Gertrude's too.* She wanted him to follow. She wanted to hear more. But duty is duty. She had signed a contract. She was on salary. She let him go. Even so, she walked the Mall in radiance. She thought she'd caught a few notes of "Ah so fair" from *Marta. Pretty mouth.*

By evening Mattie was really tired. She listened to Fina. Her page bob, still uncut, roused the worst passions of two men that morning. She eluded them in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress. They had to be signed in, and they couldn't think of any convincing scholarly projects to admit them. Of course she had her fossils and prehistoric weather patterns for such an emergency. Fina cowered in terror among volumes on the Mesozoic era complete with nineteenth century engravings. She could hardly stand on her trembling feet at closing time. Mercifully, the corridor outside the RBR was empty. And the day was not lost. She had checked numerous researchers and Library of Congress personnel.

"But if I had been subjected to men's thoughts all the way home, I should be a mental case," Fina declared. "Fatigue has its points. My ESP capacity was at zero. Ab-

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solute zero. Girls, I couldn't tell if you were lying your heads off. I'm that blank after a heavy day in the city."

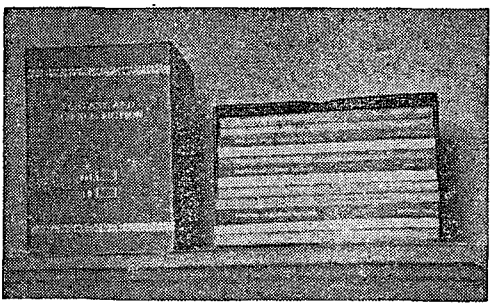
"Me, too," Elsie chimed in. "Till I started work, I never understood those early scores recorded at Duke way back when. You know, the subjects who got the whole pack of symbols, each one correct, and afterward couldn't get a thing right. They were tired, and how—like me now."

But Elsie was not too tired to dwell on affront after unvoiced affront, endured for her country. And Peg felt defiled, yet wistful.

Tears gleamed in Mattie's eyes. After all, she had worked hard. She was tired as they. But she could still speak. "What happened to you three," her voice held pure pain, "was impersonal, in a way. It isn't just what men think. It's who thinks it. Today, today I was disillusioned. Utterly. I had thought of Bob as G—Galahad when he was in Chillicothe. The filth, the sheer filth of his mind. Anyone can have dirt in the subconscious. His was everywhere. He sent out vibrations like a reek. Before he propositioned me—"

"He really—" all three gasped.

"He *really*." Mattie went through their questions like a power mower through daisies, though her voice was barely a whisper. "He said—if I resisted—' ' She gathered breath. "He threatened if I called for help—" She collapsed weeping in their sympathetic arms.



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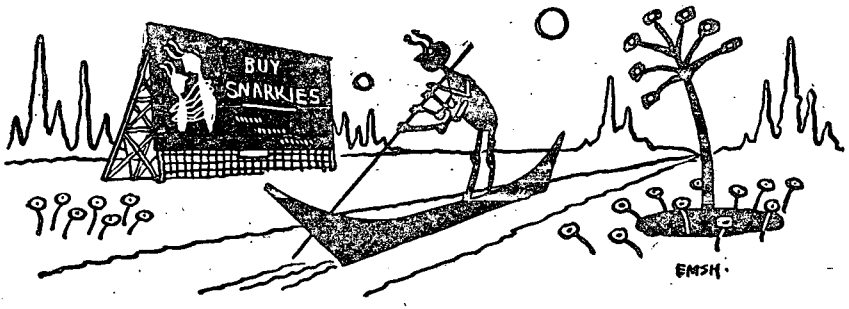

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